

# Gen 1-3 in Ancient and Contemporary Culture (Myth, Literature and Evolution)

LESSONS FROM GENESIS 1-3

### 3. The Creation

- **The three sessions:**
- 1) Gen 1: The World as God's Temple according to the Priest
- 2) Gen 2-3: The Garden, the Presence of Evil and the First Gospel
- 3) Gen 1-3 in Ancient and Contemporary Culture (Myth, Literature and Evolution)

### 3. The Creation

- 1. The Creation and Myth
- 1.1. The scientific and popular definition of myth
- The religious definition
- In a religious context, myths are storied vehicles of **supreme truth**. By them people **regulate and interpret their lives** and find worth and purpose in their existence. Myths **put one in touch with sacred realities**, the fundamental sources of being, power, and truth.

- **The literary definition**
- **Myth** is a folklore genre consisting of narratives that play a fundamental role in society, such as foundational tales. Myths often consist of sacred narratives about gods.

- **The popular meaning**
- If you describe a belief or explanation as a myth, you mean that many people believe it but it is actually untrue.

- **1.2. The Creation in extra-biblical texts**
- **A) Babylon**
- ***a) Enuma Elish („when high above”)***
- The first version of the epos (old-Babylonian) comes from 1800 - 1600 BC. Recited probably during Babylonian New Year celebration.

- „ When no gods whatever had been brought into being”, at the arbors of creation Apsu (the Abyss) and Tiamat (the Ocean) existed. They symbolized male and female elements of the universe.

- *e-nu-ma e-liš la na-bu-ú šá-ma-mu  
šap-lish am-ma-tum šu-ma la zak-rat  
ZU.AB-ma reš-tu-ú za-ru-šu-un  
mu-um-mu ti-amat mu-al-li-da-at gim-ri-šú-un  
A.MEŠ-šú-nu iš-te-niš i-ḫi-qu-ú-šú-un  
gi-pa-ra la ki-is-su-ru su-sa-a la she-'u-ú  
e-nu-ma DINGIR.DINGIR la šu-pu-u ma-na-ma*

- " When on high the heaven had not been named,
- Firm ground below had not been called by name,
- Naught but primordial Apsu, their begetter,
- (And) Mummu<sup>2</sup>-Tiamat, she who bore them all,
- Their<sup>3</sup> waters commingling as a single body
-

- The crucial moment is the creation of gods :
- *" No reed hut<sup>4</sup> had been matted, no marsh land had appeared,*
- *When no gods whatever had been brought into being,*
- *Uncalled by name, their destinies undetermined—*
- *Then it was that the gods were formed within them (Apsu and Tiamat)"*.

- Minor gods with their behavior annoy the great deities  
:
- *Apsu, opening his mouth,*
- *Said unto resplendent<sup>15</sup> Tiamat:*
- *“Their ways are verily loathsome unto me.*
- *By day I find no relief,<sup>16</sup> nor repose by night.*
- *I will destroy, I will wreck their ways,*
- *That quiet may be restored. Let us have rest!”*

- Tiamat originally opposes the plan:
- *“What? Should we destroy that which we have built?”*
- Lesser gods come to know about Apsu’s plan and kill him. Tiamat infuriated swears revenge and prepares her son, Kingu, to lead against them an army of monsters :
- *“I have cast for thee the spell, exalting thee in the Assembly of the gods.*
- *To counsel all the gods I have given thee full power”*

- Marduk leads the lesser gods to war and kills Tiamat:
- *He [Marduk] divided the monstrous shape [Tiamat] and created marvels (from it).*
- *He sliced her in half like a fish for drying:*
- *Half of her he put up to roof the sky,*
- *Drew a bolt across and made a guard hold it.*
- *Her waters he arranged so that they could not escape.*

- The creation of mankind in Mesopotamian myths involves the blood of slain deities and sometimes the mixture of clay material:
- *“Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.*
- *I will establish a savage,<sup>86</sup> ‘man’ shall be his name.*
- *Verily, savage-man I will create.*
- *He shall be charged with the service of the gods That they might be at ease!*

- *“It was Kingu who contrived the uprising,*
- *And made Tiamat rebel, and joined battle.” (30)*
- *They bound him, holding him before Ea.*
- *They imposed on him his guilt and severed his blood (vessels).*
- *Out of his blood they fashioned mankind.*
- *He<sup>93</sup> imposed the service and let free the gods.*

- ***b) Atrahasis*** – the old Babylonian version ca. 1600 BC.

- In the Atrahasis epic the minor gods called upon the mother-goddess, Nintu, to create mankind:
- *„Let Nintu [mother-goddess] mix clay, that the god and man may be thoroughly mixed together in the clay”<sup>171</sup>*
- *Later, after Nintu’s incantation, she pinches off fourteen pieces, constituting seven males and seven females.*

- **B) Egypt**

- a) For the ancient Egyptian the universe consisted of beings, not things. There are no impersonal forces, only the will and actions of the gods. Creation is a process of the unfolding of undifferentiated matter, the primeval Monad.

- “I am Atum when I was alone in Nun; I am Re in his (first) appearances, when he began to rule that which he had made.”

- “I am the great god who came into being by himself.” Who is he? “The great god who came into being by himself” is water; he is Nun, the father of the gods.
- “He who created his names, the Lord of the Ennead.”
- Pritchard, James Bennett (Hrsg.): *The Ancient Near East an Anthology of Texts and Pictures*. Princeton : Princeton University Press, 1958, S. 3

- b) The lesser gods have a genealogical relationship to Atum. “Magic” is the operative power that enables the idea or concept of creation to be realized through command.

- c) As for the creation of mankind, there are diverse accounts in Egyptian literature, but a recurring conception is the making of man from clay.

- d) man comes to being from god's tears, ca. 2000 BC
- *“I made the four winds that every man might breathe thereof like his fellow in his time. That is (one) deed thereof.*

- *“I made the great inundation that the poor man might have rights therein like the great man. That is (one) deed thereof.*

- *“I made every man like his fellow. I did not command that they do evil, (but) it was their hearts which violated what I had said.⚡ That is (one) deed thereof.*

- *“I made their hearts to cease from forgetting the West, in order that divine offerings might be given to the gods of the nomes.<sup>5</sup> That is (one) deed thereof.*

- *“I brought into being the four gods from my sweat, while men are the tears of my eye.”* <sup>4</sup>

- J. P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: The Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts*, YES 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988);
- J. A. Wilson, “Creation and Myths of Origins,” *ANET*, 3–10;
- W. K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*, trans. R. O. Faulkner et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973);
- M. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

- **C) Greece**
- **The ancient gods of the beginning**
- Chaos
- god Oceanus
- goddess named Eurynome
- Ophion
- Eros
- Gaia
- Uranus
- Tartarus

- **The next generation of gods**
- Titans
- Cronus
- Rhea

- **The new pantheon**
- Zeus
- Hestia
- Poseidon
- Demeter
- Hera
- Hades

- **The creation of man**
- Zeus did indeed bring order out of Chaos, but one of his failings was that **he did not look kindly upon the people**, those creatures that populated the lands over which he reigned.

- **Prometheus** was one of the Titans not vanquished in the war between Zeus and the giants. It is said in many myths that Prometheus had **created a race of people from clay**, or that he had combined specks of every living creature, molded them together, and produced a new race, **The Common Man**.

- Adding insult to injury, Zeus had his fellow Olympian, Hephaestus, **fashion a wicked but beautiful creature to torment Prometheus.** It was a woman, whom they named **Pandora**, which means "all gifts". She was given a precious and beautiful box, which she was told not to open, but curiosity got the better of her, and out flew "all the evils that plague men." The only "gift" that stayed in the box was "Hope".

- **1.3. Differences between Gen 1-3 and extrabiblical cosmogonies**
- *The similarities*
- a) the presence of tehom, abyss, primordial ocean
- b) the divine origin of the universe and man
- c) logic and order of the created world

- *The differences:*
- *Regarding the nature of God*
- a) there is no theogony in the Bible
- b) Jahwe is not present in the natural phenomena
  
- *Regarding man*
- a) man is not created as gods' minion destined to live life of labor and suffering
- b) man is good by nature, created on the image and likeness of God

- *Regarding the purpose of the story*
- Mesopotamia's creation epic was shaped to justify the political ascendancy of Babylon and its chief deity Marduk by setting their origins and character of their rule in the mythic, eternal present.

- **1.4. THE TRUTH OF THE CREATION ACCOUNT**
- **A) The Church does not require Christians to believe either that the universe came to be in six literal days or that it did not; Christians are free to interpret the scientific evidence for themselves.**

- **B) The truth of Genesis, however, is not at all in doubt. Genesis may use poetic and figurative language, but the important message that language expresses is clear.**

- C) The Church has given some guidelines for understanding the scientific data about cosmic and human origins in light of the biblical doctrine. It has ruled out atheistic evolution—the belief in blind progress unguided by God (see Pius XII, *Humani Generis* 35).

- **D) The Genesis creation narrative establishes a theological worldview.** Its purpose is not scientific, but apologetic, countering the many myths of the ancient Near East. The relationship between God and creation is the basis for all the rest of biblical revelation (CCC 337-44).

- 2. Creation and Evolution
- Hefner, P., 1999–2003. Evolution. *The encyclopedia of Christianity*, 2:228-234

- **2.1. The multifaceted concept of evolution**
- evolution as
- (1) an idea of change over time;
- (2) an idea of emergence, by which novelty arises from preceding entities and processes;
- (3) an idea that describes the origins of things, both proximate and ultimate;
- and (4) an idea of selection, explaining why things die or survive.

- **2.2. Problematic origins of things**
- If evolution is considered to be a description of ultimate origins, as Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett suppose, then the scientific description becomes the negation of theology, and science becomes a materialist metaphysics in its own right.

- **2.3. Theological issues**



- The fundamental issues raised for theology by evolution may be placed in three categories, which, at least for heuristic purposes, correspond to the three persons of the Trinity.

- A) First, there are the questions concerning origins, which engage the theology of creation with particular force. **These issues relate particularly to the first person of the Trinity.**

- B) Second, how can a good God be reconciled with a creation in which death and evil are inherent? The theological belief in divine providence is engaged at this point.

- C) Third, the question of the origins and purpose of morality, as described by sociobiology and evolutionary psychology, challenges theology to speak of transcendent moral truths. This question engages the doctrines of revelation and of Christology and thus falls within the purview of the second person of the Trinity.

- **2.4. Christian responses:**
- **1) Opposition – creationism vs. materialistic and agnostic evolution**
- Opposition is expressed almost exclusively by thinkers who are identified as creationists (Creationism), for whom Phillip Johnson is the leading spokesperson.

- Since creationists do not allow for any rapprochement between evolution and Christian faith, they construct alternatives to evolutionary explanations. The alternatives most vigorously presented are
- (1) the view that the biblical stories of creation, interpreted literally, are scientifically accurate depictions of origins, and
- (2) theories of “intelligent design” and “irreducible complexity”.

- **A) Young Earth creationism**
- Young Earth creationism rejects completely the conventional scientific approach and argues for the belief that the Earth was created by God within the last 10,000 years, literally as described in Genesis, within the approximate timeframe of biblical genealogies

- **B) Old Earth creationism**

- Old Earth creationism holds that the physical universe was created by God, but that the creation event of Genesis within 6 literal days is not to be taken strictly literally. This group generally accepts the age of the Universe and the age of the Earth as described by astronomers and geologists, but claims that details of the evolutionary theory are questionable.

- **C) Neo-creationism**

- Neo-creationists intentionally distance themselves from other forms of creationism, preferring to be known as wholly separate from creationism as a philosophy.

- **D) Agnostic evolution**

- Agnostic evolution is the position of acceptance of biological evolution, combined with the belief that it is not important whether God is, was, or will have been involved.

- **E) Materialistic evolution**

- Materialistic evolution is the position of acceptance of biological evolution, combined with the position that the supernatural does not exist (a position common to philosophical naturalists, humanists and atheists). It is a view championed by what have been called "*The New Atheists*", who argue strongly that the creationist viewpoint is not only dangerous, but is completely rejected by science.

- **2) Taking account of evolution**
- **The first attempts: Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834)**
- Adam and Eve are not viewed as a primal pair, the fall is interpreted as universally valid myth rather than as a historical event, and original sin is understood, not as the biological inheritance from an original pair, but rather as culturally transmitted sin.

- **G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831)** employed a version of evolutionary thought that, though elaborated in the context of natural history, is more powerfully set forth as a theory of human history. Hegel placed a full-blown theological treatment of Christian faith within this dialectical evolutionary scheme.

- **The 20<sup>th</sup> century**
- Protestant theologians Paul Tillich (1886–1965, who gave contemporary expression to many of Schleiermacher's ideas) and Emil Brunner (1889–1966), and Roman Catholic theologians Karl Rahner (1904–84) and Edward Schillebeeckx (b. 1914).

- Pontifical Academy of Sciences on October 22, 1996, seems to indicate a conditional acceptance of evolution. The Vatican position has been interpreted as uncongenial to a creationist position.

- In 1950, Pope Pius XII stated limited support for the idea of evolution in his encyclical *Humani Generis*, 36.
- In 1996, Pope John Paul II stated that, "New findings lead us toward the recognition of evolution as more than a hypothesis," but, referring to previous papal writings, he concluded that "If the origin of the human body comes through living matter which existed previously, the spiritual soul is created directly by God."

- **Theistic evolution**

- Theistic evolution is the general view that some or all classical religious teachings about God and creation are compatible with some or all of modern scientific theory, including, specifically, evolution. It generally views evolution as a tool used by God, who is both the first cause and immanent sustainer/upholder of the universe.

- **3) Evolution as a guiding theological motif**
- The tradition of French Jesuit and paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin.
- “Complexification”: aggregation and individuation

- Humans are more complex than other primates, the global society of the period after World War II more complex than the preceding epochs of more isolated nation-states.
- This process is marked by tension and conflict, even though it culminates in love, which is defined as the increasing solidarity of persons who are growing ever more individualized.

- Christ is the paradigm and dynamic force of complexification: the most complex of all realities is the omega state of eternity, which is characterized as a “center of centers.” Evolution as the process of complexification can therefore also be termed a process of “Christification” (Col. 1:17).

- **John Polkinghorne**

- John Polkinghorne was a leading theoretical physicist before his work took a theological direction.
- There is a “looseness” to reality, an indefiniteness and openness to the future that make it possible to bring together both the scientific understanding of nature’s evolutionary processes and the Christian view that God is at work in those processes.

- He holds, not to a theory of gaps in the evolutionary picture of science into which God can fit, but rather to a dimension of “gappiness” in reality, to which science itself testifies and which is an aspect of God’s creation.

- **2.6. How many were they at the beginning?  
Monogenism and polygenism**

- **Monogenism** describes a theory current in the first half of the nineteenth century, in particular, according to which **there was a single human origin, but that subsequent migration of groups of humans had subjected them to different environmental conditions**

- In France 1850s, monogenism was an unfashionable point of view. Monogenism received a second wind after the recognition of the antiquity of man, and the almost simultaneous publication of Darwin's theory of evolution.

- The monogenesis is supported by the theory of **recent African origin of modern humans**. Monogenesis is also embraced, because of the doctrine of the original sin, by the Pope Pius XII in the Roman Catholic Church (see *Humani generis*).



Chimpanzee  
*Pan troglodytes*  
modern  
300-500 mL



STS 5  
*Australopithecus africanus*  
2.5 million years  
487 mL



STS 71  
*A. africanus*  
2.5 million yrs  
450 mL



KNM-ER 1813  
*Homo habilis*  
1.89 million yrs  
506 mL



OH24  
*Homo habilis*  
1.8 million yrs  
586 mL



KNM-ER 1470  
*Homo rudolfensis*  
1.89 million yrs  
776 mL



KNM-ER 3733  
*Homo ergaster*  
1.78 million yrs  
825 mL



Broken Hill 1  
*Homo heidelbergensis*  
0.35 million yrs  
1310 mL



La Ferrassie 1  
*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*  
0.07 million yrs  
1650 mL



La Chapelle-aux-Saints  
*Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*  
0.05 million yrs  
1609 mL



Cro-Magnon I  
*Homo sapiens sapiens*  
0.03 million yrs  
1616 mL



*Homo sapiens sapiens*  
Modern  
Average cranial capacity:  
1375 / 1215 (male/female)

## • 2.7. Conclusions

- 1) Evolution as a multifaceted concept
- 2) Christian theology has been engaged with evolutionary ideas for two centuries
- 3) The engagement of theology with evolution: Can Christian convictions about God and transcendence be integrated with full appreciation of the natural world?