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AND GOD SAW THAT IT WAS BEAUTIFUL:
AESTHETICS, FORM, AND BEAUTY IN GENESIS 1:1–2:4

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED FOR PRESENTATION BY

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INTRODUCTION

Hebrew Bible scholar and clergyman James A. Montgomery once wrote that scholars of the Hebrew religion "accept the νοητικόν and the ἐθικόν, the logically intelligible and practically livable elements of the religion, but omit another, that of the perception of the universe, the aesthetic element, or as it may equally be termed, the poetic."[1] While artists and poets attend themselves to such aesthetic matters, Christian theology—especially in its Protestant and Post-Protestant manifestations—has yet to yield a biblical or systematic theology of beauty.[2] Why has contemporary theology lacked this serious treatment?

As with the Hebrew religious thought mentioned by Montgomery in his 1937 article, Post-Enlightenment ethical and systematic approaches have focused theological inquiry toward pragmatic and utilitarian affairs. As a result, matters deemed abstract found little placement in the systems of thought and practice developing out of these movements. In the distant past, such theologians as Augustine and Thomas Aquinas did much to develop beauty in the faith conversation of the middle ages using approaches reflective of dependence on and dialogue with Neo-Platonic (Augustine) and Aristotelian (Aquinas) philosophies. Scholars seeking to engage with theological aesthetics are deeply indebted to the works of Augustine and Aquinas—and

[1] James A. Montgomery, "Aesthetic in Hebrew Religion," *JBL* 56 (1937): 35–41.

[2] E.g., Gerard Manley Hopkins—a renowned Victorian-era poet and Jesuit priest provokes his readers towards transcendence among the created —or in his words—God's grandeur when he writes, "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil; It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil Crushed." See Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose*, London: Penguin Classics, 1953 (repr. 1985), 27.

may even find parallel themes to the Greek philosophical systems—however, what is needed is a contemporary biblical theology of beauty. This assertion is not without dispute.

While Protestant pragmatics and Greek philosophical thought challenges the development of a biblical theology of beauty, Jo Ann Davidson gives six additional reasons for this theological neglect: (1) ethical concerns for poverty (which deem beauty an indulgence); (2) appeals to the second commandment of the Decalogue as prohibitive of such endeavors; (3) eschatological urgency precludes peripheral issues such as aesthetics; (4) beauty has more to do with Greek philosophy—as mentioned above—rather than Christian inquiry; (5) postmodern critical studies demonstrate the perceived impossibility of dealing with fundamental or absolutist claims of reality; and (6) claims that the Bible contains no viable theory of beauty.[3] Davidson goes on to say that "theology, by and large, does not yet realize the extent to which it might be informed and enriched by the biblical aesthetic."[4]

What might Christian thought and practice lose if it neglects a theology of beauty? Can Christian expression and faith thrive on purely pragmatic notions? Theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar has performed the most thorough approach to these issues in recent decades with his multi-volume work titled *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. In it, he speaks of the necessity of beauty's place within the three transcendentals and correctly details the seriousness of neglecting beauty. He writes:

> Beauty is the word that shall be our first. Beauty is the last thing which the thinking intellect dares to approach, since only it dances as an un-contained splendor around the double constellation of the true and the good and their inseparable relation to one another. Beauty is the disinterested one without which the ancient world refused to understand

[3] Jo Ann Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), 10. Though some of these points will be answered, it is beyond the scope of this essay to address these challenges fully. Readers are encouraged to engage Davidson's work for a detailed discussion of these objections.
[4] Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 10.

> itself ... a world which both imperceptibly and yet unmistakably has bid farewell to our new world ... a world of interests, leaving it to its own avarice and sadness. No longer loved or fostered by religion, beauty is lifted from its face as a mask, and its absence exposes features on that face which threaten to become incomprehensible to man. We no longer dare to believe in beauty and we make of it a mere appearance in order the more easily to dispose of it. Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance. We can be sure that whoever sneers at her name as if she were an ornament of a bourgeois past—whether he admits it or not can no longer pray and soon will no longer be able to love.[5]

Cosmetics, attraction, and in some cases, oppression are some marks of this beauty lifted from a biblical theological understanding. Distorted by industry and largely neglected by the academy, polis, and the church, beauty in contemporary society is relegated to the inane or subjective experience (areas better labeled as attraction).[6] Elaine Scarry further reinforces von Balthasar when she states that "permitted to inhabit neither the realm of the ideal nor the realm of the real, to be neither aspiration nor companion, beauty comes to us like a fugitive bird unable to fly, unable to land."[7]

Can Christian theology provide this space for beauty to land and thrive? Do the Christian Scriptures evidence the theological and philosophical witness needed to develop a robust theology of beauty? This essay tangentially addresses these concerns by moving toward a biblical theology of beauty from the Christian Scriptures. Taking Gen 1:1–2:4 as foundational to

[5] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, *Seeing the Form* Volume 1 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 18.
[6] While a full articulation of this idea extends beyond the scope of this work, it is important to address this assertion. Attraction constitutes that which appeals to sensory and social sensibilities in which the individual observer becomes a microcosm of culturally shared coherent thought. While this coherence may be logically consistent, it may or may not correspond to reality. This essay is premised on understanding theological beauty and its ontological function in Christian Scripture. Therefore, beauty transcends social coherence and speaks to reality as it is.
[7] Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 86.

the Christian scriptural witness—as seen both in canonical placement and thematic dependence within both testaments—this essay submits that Gen 1:1–2:4 provides the paradigmatic theological witness to the nature and function of beauty as it bears on issues of God's identity, the causality of creational being, aesthetics of creational integrity, and reality in creation of sacred space (issues bearing on ontology and ontotheology). It begins by briefly addressing the source critical, historico-scientific, linguistic, and theological issues surrounding Gen 1:1–2:4 and then moves toward articulating beauty within the pericope.

Through this endeavor, beauty is understood in three ways. First, Gen 1:1–2:4 represents the causal event of self-giving through retraction of the divine self (who is source beauty in essence) to allow potential for otherness to become. The creation-event constitutes a paradigm through which beauty is understood as creativity manifest in distancing action and self-giving which provides potential for creational flourishing. Second, this otherness of being emanates from the nascent disorder (void) which provides opportunity for creative potential to be realized through the interrelation of the divine *perichoretic* community, which causes origination of the creation of sacred spatial, inhabitant, and delimitation (through time) to be realized and ordered. As a result, ordered being constitutes the second paradigm of beauty in which harmonic interrelations within creation (reflected in both the contrasting form and boundaried relationships between cosmic bodies, spatial realms, inhabitants, and God) is beautiful because it reflects the harmonic community of being within God's self. This order is also recognized within the biblical literature written on these themes, reflected by employing exalted literary conventions as parallelism, numerical continuities (such as the usage of seven in Gen 1:1–2:4), and relationality which evokes the listening communities (both ancient and contemporary) to awe. Therefore, it is not improper to call the pericope of Gen 1:1–2:4 beautiful.

Third, the realities of space, inhabitants, and time play a functional role in continued creative service for the sake of beautifying sacred space. As each entity fulfills its intended purpose for flourishing and proper relationality (by ruling and subduing, bearing fruit, multiplying), it culminates in God's solidarity with creation reflected through glorification. Therefore, intentional utility consistent with purposeful origination for God's glory constitutes the third paradigm for understanding beauty. Therefore, this essay argues that Gen 1:1–2:4 provides the proper foundation for developing a theology of beauty and articulating thematic paradigms for understanding beauty as reflected throughout Christian Scripture.

COMMON ISSUES SURROUNDING GENESIS 1:1–2:4

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to address in detail the myriad of issues surrounding Gen 1:1–2:4, acknowledging some of the primary issues confronting scholars when studying this pericope frames the contribution this essay makes to the field. There are three primary issues which have confronted Genesis scholarship over the past century. These issues are source criticism, historico-scientific readings, and theologically important linguistic difficulties.

Julius Wellhausen's articulation of the Documentary Hypothesis has played an important role in understanding the source material found in Gen 1:1–2:4 over the last century. Dividing authorship of the Hebrew Bible into four categories (J—Yahwist, E—Elohist, D—Deuteronomist, and P—Priestly schools), this source-critical methodology fragments the text of Genesis and attributes the first chapter to the "priestly" author or redactor.[8] The Documentary

[8] For examples of this approach, see David M. Carr's discussion of this reconstruction in David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford

Hypothesis is not without difficulties, subject both to a form of tautology as well as speculative claims for the sources. Carolyn Sharp puts the issue succinctly when she writes "I am convinced that it is valuable to wrestle with the implications of the theory, even though most days, I have serious doubts about some of the assumptions underlying it."[9] The evidence for authorship of this pericope, traditionally attributed to Moses, creates a challenge for scholars engaging in the work of reconstructing the timeframe and *Sitz im Leben* in which the account arose. However, attempting to determine authorial intention and development (while yielding plausible theories at best) may be better discerned through mirror-reading the text against the ANE backdrop and receiving the text as a complete historical narrative, meant to be taken as a witness to the creation event. These challenges give further rise to the second issue common to study of Gen 1:1–2:4.

Much ink has been spilled over the last two centuries concerning the purpose of the Genesis creation account's writing and its bearing on historical and scientific reality. Building on the idea that the pericope is attributable to the source-critical Priestly author, scholars point out the emphases of the chapter on themes such as boundaries, classification, blessing, and Sabbath as indicating a theological purpose as opposed to scientific truth.[10] Other scholars point to the similarities in theme to other ANE creation epics—such as the *Enuma Elish*—as the source or influence for the ancient Hebrew authors account in Gen 1:1–2:4. Readings of the Gen 1:1–2:4 pericope against the ANE backdrop provide both helpful parallel themes as well as dramatic departures from that cultural environment for the Hebrew account. Gerhard F. Hasel, while

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University Press, 2011), 108–09. Also see Edwin Firmage, "Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda," *JSOT* 82 (1999): 97–114.

[9] Carolyn J. Sharp, *Wrestling the Word: The Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Believer* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 49.

[10] Gene Rice, "Cosmological Ideas and Religious Truth in Genesis 1," *JRT* 23 (1966): 15.

noting the parallel themes of Gen 1:1–2:4 and other ANE accounts, contrasts these ideas and identifies that antimythical polemics operate within the pericope and create a parting cosmological outlook from the other ANE cosmogonies.[11]

Drawing on these comparisons, the case is made for reading the pericope against this backdrop, at times allowing the cultural milieu to dictate the theological themes read in the text.[12] This cultural influence is present in contemporary readings of the text as well. Standard scientific and historic paradigms and cosmologies which see earth history and life evolution—as involving deep time driven by naturalistic processes—pose serious questions to certain traditional readings of the text.[13] In the current state the Genesis creation account is viewed as: (1) historicized mythology in which ancient cultural ideas shaped the ancient understanding of the natural world for the Hebrew religion; (2) paradigmatic for understanding science and history, and any contemporary theory must align with a literalist reading of this pericope; (3) this pericope mainly has theological aims as its intentions and has little or no bearing on the material world and its natural processes. Tensions and debate have marked these differing understandings since their inception with each group dividing into its own camp of thought. The other primary area of inquiry into this pericope involves the linguistic difficulties present in the text. Issues such as the meaning of *yôm*, *tehom* and its relation to *Tiamat*, from the *Enuma Elish*, whether

[11] Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): 20.

[12] For discussion on these issues see James E. Atwell, "An Egyptian Source for Genesis 1," *JTS* 51 (2000): 441–77. Gordon H. Johnston, "Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths," *BS* 165 (2008): 178–94. Arvid S. Kapelrud, "The Mythological Features in Genesis Chapter 1 and the Author's Intentions," *VT* 24 (1974): 178–86. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

[13] This approach often follows some form of 17th century Archbishop James Ussher's understanding of the genealogical timeline of Scripture consisting of 6000 years and sees the days in this pericope as literal twenty-four-hour time periods.

this passage constitutes a narrative or poetry, and its structure are all questions important to understanding Gen 1:1–2:4.

This work assumes and develops these by first working from the position that the Gen 1 creation account speaks about the natural realm and corresponds to reality which came forth at God's utterance within the pericope. Further, intertextual references and allusions throughout Christian Scripture to the creation in Gen 1 take the text as a historical narrative witnessing to the creation of history and material essence.[14] While there are significant scientific challenges to a literalistic reading of Gen 1:1–2:4, these challenges are not insurmountable.[15] Further, the challenge to separating the account from correspondence with reality beyond the text risks undermining the integrity of the textual witness to the leading motifs of both the HB and the NT.

These issues are significant to this essay because it sees a theology of beauty as corresponding to the nature and reality of God, the causality of creational being, aesthetics of creational integrity, and reality in the creation of sacred space. These each correspond to the fashioning of matter and nature as that sacred space in which beauty can be witnessed and understood observationally and textually. Therefore, beyond the important issues of textual composition and cultural backdrop, the text of Gen 1:1–2:4 reveals a synthesis of historical narrative, creational purpose, and the nature of being as revealed through its inherent beauty.

Terence Groth argues that Scripture gives "Spirit-inspired (i.e. divine) accounts and literature in which beauty is either profoundly referenced (i.e. witnessed to and implicitly

[14] A few examples include: Job 38:4; Pss 19:1, 33:6, 90:2, 95:6, 124:8; Jer 32:17; Isa 40:28; Matt 19:4–5; John 1:1–5; Rom 1:20; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 3:4.

[15] For an exploration of how some scholars and scientists are approaching both the theological and scientific inquiry into Gen 1:1–2:4 from a literal reading of the text, see Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change: Genesis 1:1–2:4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor, 1997; rev. and repr. 2017).

described) or demonstrated (as in the poetic literature)"[16] and goes on to claim that readers may be able to deduce aesthetics theory from the scriptural witness, but this "would not be a *theology* of aesthetics as much as a *biblical theory* of aesthetics—i.e., some fundamental principles of aesthetics…."[17] While his claim is true that Scripture provides—whether implicit or explicit—witness to beauty, his bifurcation between theology and theory may be overstated. Biblical theology traces the canonical recounting of the ongoing narrative line of God and the tensions of sovereignty and solidarity with creation and creation's response back—beginning in Gen 1:1. Further, theology is a branch of theoretical thought (though one that people of faith take as corresponding to reality), and theory possesses a fundamental theological core which is generative to new theoretical inquiries.[18] Therefore, while Gen 1:1–2:4 contains principles for aesthetics, which may prove generative to other fields of inquiry such as art or music theory, this essay demonstrates that these foundational passages lay a proper groundwork for understanding beauty as a appropriate theological development due to beauty's direct assignment to the witness of God's nature and how God frames the cosmos.

FORM: EXALTED LITERARY ARTISTRY

Before exploring the content of Gen 1:1–2:4 and its contribution to theological beauty in detail, first consideration is given to the beauty woven into the form of the passage itself. The text of Gen 1:1–2:4 expresses a most unusual form for its genre. It features a structure of parallel components arranged around each creation day (*yôm*). While block parallelism is a feature of

[16] Terence R. Groth, "Toward a Biblical Theory of Aesthetics," *CJ* (Fall 2012): 332.
[17] Groth, "Toward a Biblical Theory of Aesthetics," 332.
[18] See William Young, "Theory and Theology" (paper presented as part of the annual Harry A. Worcester Lectures at the Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, April 8, 1968).

poetry throughout the Hebrew Bible, this account constitutes a narrative due to its consistent usage of *wayyiqtol* to describe the sequence of events.[19] William Brown describes the organization of the pericope as "two parallel columns, establishing a well-coordinated symmetry."[20]

Day 7: Gen 2:1–4; God's Restful Inhabitation of Sacred Space	
Space	Inhabitant
• Day 3: Gen 1:9–13; Land and Vegetation • Day 2: Gen 1:6–8; Firmament and Waters • Day 1: Gen 1:3–5; Light and Darkness	• Day 6: Gen 1:24–31; Land Creatures and Humanity • Day 5: Gen 1:20–23; Winged Creatures and Sea Creatures • Day 4: Gen 1:14–19; Greater and Lesser Lights

This structure consists of the first three days ordering of sacred space (light and darkness, sky and waters, land and vegetation) and the last three days ordering the sacred inhabitants of that space (heavenly bodies, birds and sea creatures, land animals and humans). The form of this account has a certain aesthetic identifiable within the architecture of the structure and the exalted effect—given its high imagery and narrative flow—it evoked in both the primary listening community of the ANE and in contemporary hearers of the text. It may be appropriate to consider the account as a narrative with a poetic effect. This understanding matches its usage in Ps 104. This psalm represents a form of inner-biblical interpretation in which the psalmist

[19] C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2006), 43.
[20] William P. Brown, *A Handbook to Old Testament Exegesis* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2017), 106.

constructs his literary form as a poetic retelling, building on the sequence of the creation days (as well as structuring a chiastic pattern) and employing common wording for each corresponding section.[21] Aesthetic literary patterns in Gen 1:1–2:4 not only demonstrate a symmetry of six creation days, but each day is also indicative of creative utterance—as in "And God said, 'Let there be. . .'"(ESV). Further, the literary structure serves to evoke praise. In addition to its parallel structure and progressive movement, its beauty is also reflected in liturgical patterns such as its usage of seven (a significant number in antiquity).[22] The Hebrew of Gen 1:1 has seven words, Gen 1:2 uses fourteen words, the seven creation days occur in seven paragraphs in the Hebrew—leading up to the seventh day as the accounts climax—and significant terms are used in multiples of seven including "good" (seven) "earth" (twenty-one), and "God" (thirty-five).[23] The seven's, therefore, symbolically lead listeners into the sacredness of God's creative work.

Further, emphasizing the union of the aesthetics of God's creative action within the structure of the pericope is the refrain of *tôv* at the end of each creation day. A Hebrew adjective, *tôv* has at its roots the meaning of good, beautiful, or perfection.[24] Contextually, its usage in Gen 1:1–2:4 is employed in terms of evaluating the quality and purpose of the creative actions upon their completion. Elsewhere in the HB, its usage possesses an aesthetic quality which is equated with the form of the nature of the object or person spoken of (examples include Gen 2:9, 3:6, 6:2,

[21] Richard M. Davidson, "The Creation Theme in Psalm 104," in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 156.
[22] Marty E. Stevens, *Theological Themes of the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 2.
[23] Marty E. Stevens, *Theological Themes of the Old Testament*, 2–3.
[24] This is also reflected by the LXX translation's employment of the Greek *kalós* to describe the quality of creation. Georg Bertram writes by "using *kalós,* the translator introduces the idea of the beauty of the world, and this recurs in the Wisdom literature at Wis. 13:7: *kala ta blepomena*. See "kalós," *TDNT* 3:544.

24:16, and 26:7). Terence Fretheim remarks that this usage "carries the sense of achieving the divine intention, which includes elements of beauty, purpose, and praise…. God sees the creature, experiences what has been created, and is affected by what is seen."[25] This constitutes what David Bentley Hart describes as the distance of delight. His argument is worth quoting at length:

> Beauty is the true form of distance. Beauty inhabits, belongs to, and possesses distance, but more than that, it gives distance. If the realm of created difference has its being for God's pleasure (Rev. 4:11), then the distance of creation from God and every distance within creation belong originally to an interval of appraisal and approbation, the distance of delight. God's pleasure—the beauty creation possesses in his regard—underlies the distinct being of creation, and so beauty is the first and truest word concerning all that appears within being; beauty is the showing of what is; God looked upon what he had wrought and saw that it was good.[26]

In this sense, *tôv* demonstrates a conceptual link between the terminology of appraisal ("good" in nature, utility, ethics, and in right relationship) and the distance of delight ("beautiful" in quality, otherness as created being, creational integrity, and aesthetic). Further, distance serves a delineating interpretive function by which proper relationship (beauty through order) is appreciated between creator and created, thus providing proper space for aesthetic evaluation (as Fretheim discussed) of both distinction and solidarity between the nature, function, and orderly interrelatedness of God and creational being. Again, by showing what is as Hart demonstrates.

Returning to Ps 104, these traits of *tôv* are seen in the psalmist's thematic development of joy and playfulness (distance of delight) along with the orderly exalted literary style and high imagery employed.[27] Further, this pleasing distance maintains the quality of an ideal creational

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[25] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections" in *NIB* 1 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 344.

[26] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 18.

[27] Richard M. Davidson, "The Creation Theme in Psalm 104," 177.

existence (represented later by Eden) in which later salvific themes will draw (such as Isa 65:17–25).[28]

CREATION EVENT AS ACT OF BEAUTIFYING SACRED SPACE

Building upon the exalted literary structure of Gen 1:1–2:4 frames the upcoming discussion in which the content of the pericope is considered more fully, formed around ordering sacred space (days 1–3) and filling this space with the sacred inhabitants (days 4–6 with day 7 being a distinctive day of inhabitation as will be discussed later in the essay). As Hart helpfully addresses, the reality of beauty necessitates the creation of distance. Creating distance implies some form of movement to take place for proper spatiality and appreciation between Creator and what is created—what is articulated as God's otherness or transcendence beyond material creationality. Where might this movement be recognized in the creation event? Approaching the text from a trinitarian reading, movement within Gen 1:1–2:4 develops from the flow of the inner-economy of God's triune being in communal relationship with the three persons reflected in the trinitarian formula of the creation event ("In the beginning, God"; "the Spirit hovered over the face of the waters"; "And God said") and stated as "us" in Gen 1:26. This divine action is best reflected through the ancient idea of *perichoresis* in which each person in the trinity participates in a form of interpenetration (or cosmic dance) resulting in the outflow of newness. Hart describes this movement as "the utter fullness of an infinite dynamism, the absolutely complete and replete generation of the Son and procession of the Spirit from the Father, the infinite 'drama' of God's joyous act of self-outpouring—which is his being as God."[29] God's identity throughout Scripture is noted by this self-giving from which creation and new creation

[28] Jo Ann Davidson, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 160.

[29] David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 167.

proceeds (as reflected in 2 Cor 5:17 wherein believers are participants in the new creational reality in the present as a result of Christ's sacrifice).[30]

Fundamental to the act of creation, therefore, is an act of self-giving in order that proper distance is formed to allow the potential for creational space. Without this self-giving retraction of the divine community, God's omnipresence in the fullness of His glory would restrict the possibility for creation to proceed.[31] Hence self-giving is paradigmatic for understanding beauty because it allows potential for creational creativity.[32] Reading Ps 136, one notices that the psalmist roots praise for the goodness and beauty of creation in God's steadfast love (which is always an act of sacrificial self-giving in solidarity with creation on God's part). Creation, as a historical act, is beautiful due to the aesthetics of the creational event. In other words, creation signifies the primordial first act of beauty because "beauty is an event; beauty happens when the Whole offers itself in the fragment, and when this self-giving transcends infinite distance."[33]

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[30] While the biblical witness attests to other possibilities of identifying marks for God's identity (e.g. divine wrath, untameability of God, de-creation, etc.), these characteristics are expressed to reestablish solidarity and self-giving once creational integrity and orderly functioning has been compromised. This is reflected in the central biblical testimony of God's personhood found in Ex 34:5–7.

[31] This idea is tangentially related to the Jewish mystic idea of *Zimzum*. Interested readers are encouraged to see a brief treatment in David A. Cooper, *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 76. For a more thorough treatment see Christoph Schulte, *Zimzum: Gott und Weltursprung* (Jüdischer Verlag im Suhrkamp Verlag, 2014).

[32] Throughout Christian Scripture, only heavenly creations can encounter God in the fullness of glory (i.e. seraphim). One recalls Moses' partial encounter in which a veil was needed to cloak the glory brought back from Sinai. Thematically, the otherness of God in full resplendence cannot coexist entirely with creational being (as is also identified in the incarnation of *Logos* for God to encounter humanity as in John 1). Therefore, this distancing retraction opens the possibility for something other than God to be created.

[33] Bruno Forte, *The Portal of Beauty: Towards a Theology of Aesthetics* (trans. David Glenday; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), vii.

But the act of creation consists not only in this self-giving movement. In Gen 1–2, God is also represented as a Potter by employing the participial form of the verb *yāṣar*.[34] Additionally, when God fashions the created order in the pericope, the word *bārā'* is used. God alone is the subject of this verb, and it is clear from its usage that the term only describes the unique quality of God's creative activity.[35] All of creation participates in creative action (as will be discussed below), yet this creativity constitutes fabrication or procreation from pre-sourced material—unlike God's action which molds space, time, and being *ex nihilo*. So what purpose does God employ for beauty, and how does it relate to the arrival of the beauty of otherness in being outside God's trinitarian community?

Genesis 1:1–2

The book of Genesis begins with the words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters" (ESV). According to standard constructions of Hebrew grammar, verse one is an "independent (or 'absolute') phrase, since the finite verb (*bārā'*) is not preceded by the construct form, nor does the context demand a construct meaning. Grammatically and contextually, the best translation is the traditional 'absolute' or 'independent' one: 'In the beginning, God created.'"[36] Richard M. Davidson argues compellingly for this understanding of the Hebrew in Gen 1:1.

> In harmony with this normal function of Hebrew grammar, elsewhere in Scripture when the word *bĕrēšît* occurs as a construct in a dependent clause, it is always followed by an absolute noun (with which it is in construct), not a finite verb, as in Genesis 1:1. Furthermore, in Hebrew grammar there is regularly no article with temporal words such as "beginning" when linked with a preposition. Thus, "in the beginning" is the natural reading of this phrase. Isaiah 46:10 provides a precise parallel to Genesis 1:1: the term *mērē'šît*, or

[34] Richard M. Davidson, "The Creation Theme in Psalm 104," 185.
[35] See discussion in Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 342.
[36] Douglas F. Kelley, *Creation and Change*, 84.

> "from the beginning," without the article, is clearly in the absolute and not the construct. Grammatically, therefore, the natural reading of Genesis 1:1 is as an independent clause: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."[37]

Therefore, Gen 1:1–2 denotes not a conflict with the *tehom* but bears only a loose comparison to other ANE accounts (such as the *Enuma Elish*) by way of polemic toward *Tiamat* and not dependence on the *Enuma Elish*. Collins writes that the statement of "without form and void" in Gen 1:2 "is not a term for a 'disorderly chaos' but pictures the earth as an 'unproductive and uninhabited place.' There is no indication that the 'deep' is any kind of opponent; indeed, in the rest of the Bible it does his bidding and praises him."[38] Therefore, the creation event arrives not from primordial battle but proceeds from God's trinitarian, self-giving moment. The creation act is the first act of beauty in which God uses speech to fashion the creation of the material for the heavens and the earth. The ancient Hebrews employed the "heavens and earth" merism to define the extent of all that comprises the created cosmos. This first act of creation brought together and prepared all the material through the Spirit brooding over the primordial wasteland—much like an artist prepares her materials for the composition of a painting or song.

Genesis 1:3–13

The terms for formlessness and void (*tohu wabohu*) of the nascent *tehom* points to the purpose for the unfolding of the first three days of creation—setting structure to the *tehom*.[39] What proceeds can be viewed as a sort of cosmic *toledot* in which the created order proceeds from the

[37] Contra Robert D. Holmstedt, "The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis I 1," *VT* 58 (2008), 56–67. Richard M. Davidson, "The Genesis Account of Origins" in *The Genesis Creation Account and its Reverberations in the Old Testament* (ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil; Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015), 67.

[38] Collins cites Gen 7:11; 8:2; 49:25; Pss 33:7; 104:6; 135:6; 148:7; Prov 3:20; 8:28 as examples. Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 54.

[39] Marty E. Stevens, *Theological Themes of the Old Testament*, 2.

expectant and procreative utterance of God to the deep and then into a well-ordered universe. This concludes with a recounting of the created order by the *toledot* formula in Gen 2:4. What bearing might these verses have on understanding the purpose of beauty? The first three creation days develop this understanding in four ways.

First, they develop form from *tehom*. Form is an aesthetic value which displays the function, quality, and integrity of what is created. This form is drawing order and coherence into a systematic whole, and this is what is unfolding in the pericope. Second, this systematic form comprises the ordering of sacred space. In day one, God orders the light and darkness. These elements give aesthetic contrast to the formation of *tehom* through patterns of illumination within the darkness. The darkness is a reminder of the primal void which the light is illuminating to indicate God's continual delimiting speech.[40] As a result of these oscillations between light and darkness, variation in this light is a marker of aesthetic integrity from a phenomenological perspective. On day two, God separates the *tehom* into contrasting and generative spaces. The waters of the sky and the waters of the sea provide the essential quality needed for ongoing survival and creativity (procreation) in sacred space. Day three brings dry ground and vegetation, again pointing to the life-generating potential of sacred space. Each of the first three days combine spatial themes (pleasing distance) with form adding the aesthetic value of beauty (*tov*) in *God's* visual evaluation of sacred space.

Third, beauty is woven within the spatial fabric of creation as an aesthetic ethic foundational to what it means to be in the world. While it was earlier proposed that creational space developed from a retraction of presence (as an action of self-giving, the foundational act of

[40] See discussion in Rick Wadholm Jr., "What is in a Day?: The Theological Significance of Yôm in Genesis 1," *Didaskalia* (2018): 75–98.

beauty) stemming from the trinitarian interrelation exemplified in *perichoretic* harmony, this notion also fits with the Christian theological understanding of God's omnipresence. The progressive beautification of the creational space from primal void to cosmic order implies the realization of his glory as a continuance of God's omnipresence. In other words, the purpose of beauty as seen in these verses—exemplified in the aesthetics of form, contrast, illumination, and spatial pleasure of the created order—is to reflect God's mutuality of omnipresence with sacred space. God is both other (transcendent) and immanent in relation to sacred space. God's immanence in this paradoxical tension is phenomenologically expressed within God's glorification through creation's beauty.

Finally, one issue left unaddressed is time's role in the account. One, two, and three-dimensional reality is the phenomenological experience of the form of being in sacred space. And yet, God's ordering of *tehom* includes the institution of the fourth dimension of experience: time. By employing *yôm* in the formation of the void, God creates limits on creative endeavor for the sake of greater generation. Rick Wadham Jr. explains this when he writes:

> There is no infinite creating nor does special creation even continue beyond a very finite beginning. The means by which *yôm* is used to structure the week creates a definite purpose in limiting all that God created. It is thus distinguished from God's own Being as created within such limitations (not to mention as that which has been altogether created). Creation does not share in the boundless existence of God because creation is by default that which was created, and further, that which was created within a specific period of time as apart from the aseity of God's eternal Being. Such boundaries speak volumes of the finitude of creation …. Genesis one is fashioned to allow for *yôm* to take the role in an altogether different manner which places the emphasis squarely upon this usage (i.e. limitation or delineation).[41]

Delimitation and ephemerality of time provides a vessel of beauty within which rhythms of creativity and restoration are given form and movement. Time, then, is one way that sacred space

[41] Rick Wadholm Jr., "What is In a Day?," 77.

and its inhabitants operate within a boundary of finitude by which to contrast its own otherness to God, evoking glorification of God's transcendence within sacred space.

CREATIONAL INTEGRITY OF SACRED INHABITANTS AS BEAUTIFICATION OF SACRED SPACE

Days four, five, and six moves from beautifying distance (spatialization) to inhabitation of sacred space. This movement provides proper ordering of these inhabitants to develop not only proper function within the spatial realm, but also a relational form from the *tehom*. This relational ordering once more points to the harmonic *perichoretic* dance in which each person of the Trinity shares in communal Being in perfect order. Creational order, then, demonstrates the terms of proper movements within the boundaries of the Creator's designated proximity to each other within the cosmic sacred space.

Genesis 1:14–26

Proceeding from this trinitarian cosmic dance are the inhabitants of each proper space ordered on the first three creation days. Day four's inhabitants (the sun, moon, and stars) provide rhythms of illumination, clarity, and form to the function of time as beautifying sacred space. Day five's inhabitants are the creatures of the air and seas—birds, fishes, and other inhabitants of these realms. Within these higher order relational beings, there now is a new call from God: the call to take part in ongoing creation itself. Infused within these inhabitants of sacred space is the ability to fabricate and regenerate from the material substrate of the earth into more relational beings of like kind. This continues into day six which notes the arrival of land animals and humanity as the final created inhabitants of sacred space.

Looking at this account, beautification of sacred space produces glorification of divine presence in two ways. First, the increasing complexity of functional relationships is demonstrative of God's beingness and his purpose for image as reflected beauty in his creation. Jeremy Begbie writes:

> A theological account of created beauty will speak of creation as testifying to God's beauty, but in its own distinctive ways. Much here turns on doing full justice to a double grain in Scripture's witness: The Creator's faithful commitment to the cosmos he has made, and his commitment to the cosmos in its otherness. Creation testifies to God's beauty, but in its own ways; or better: God testifies to his own beauty through creation's own beauty.[42]

The form of the being of these inhabitants displays a type of reflected beauty as its unique claim to illustrating the source beauty of God. Further, aesthetic integrity is displayed when each created kind dwells in orderly relation within spatial bounds. Represented in the framework of the spatiality of sacred inhabitants includes the relations to both self and the other. Already mentioned examples of these proper relations from the pericope include the separation of the expanse in 1:7, the vegetation sprouting according to each kind in 1:11–12, cycles of days and seasons in 1:14, ordering of the inhabitants of sea, sky, and land in 1:20–25 and humanity's relationship with God, each other, and the entire created order in 1:26–30. In Isa 60:8–13 there is a parallel theme that exemplifies this. In post-*diaspora* Israel, God is proclaiming his promises to an embattled and scattered nation for a future glory. This glory is tied to God's own resplendence witnessed through Israel's beautification (Isa 60:9) and the flourishing of creational being within the spatial boundaries of the nation as a beautification of his own sanctuary for his glorification (Isa 60:13).

[42] Jeremy S. Begbie, "Created Beauty: The Witness of J. S. Bach" in *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (ed. Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 25.

Within this category of spatialization, inhabitants share a solidarity through aesthetic material creation. This cosmos is a shared resource in which all inhabitants of sacred space must honor proximity to ensure survival, continued procreative action, and nourishment for the other. As Sallie McFague puts it, we are "all enclosed together in the womblike space of our circular planet or, in terms of our model, within the nurturing matrix of God's body."[43] Recognition of creational boundaries within created kinds, maintenance of spatialized boundaries for the inhabitants thriving, and common creation of inhabitants of sacred space from the stuff of the earth demonstrates the foundational concepts of beauty. These realities are beauty demonstrated as order over disorder, as relational flourishing over the formless *tehom*, and as harmonious functioning within sacred space. Each creature, then, not only demonstrates beauty through its aesthetic integrity of being as an individual created by God, but also each inhabitant dwelling as a self-giving member of the creational community within sacred space contributes to the greater beauty of the cosmos.[44] This beautification of sacred space through its inhabitants communal identity as glorification points back to creation as the radiation of God's beauty from the inner self-giving life of the Trinity.

Genesis 1:27–31

While each creature bears some call to display of aesthetic integrity and creative reflection as part of its beautification of sacred space, one created being bears a unique role within the

[43] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 100.

[44] Jame Schaefer, "Appreciating the Beauty of Earth," *TS* 62 (2001): 31. Schaefer here is discussing the thought of patristic and medieval theologians on the nature of beauty.

community of creation. Humankind is the final inhabitant to be structured in the Gen 1:1–2:4 account. This forming of the formless *tehom* culminates with this inhabitant's completion in the cosmic structure. This point is important because it recognizes something of the role of ruling as signifying the ending of God's original creative action. Bauckham notes that "humans are one of two categories of creatures to whom God gives the special task of 'ruling': the sun and the moon 'rule' (*mashal*) the day and the night (1:16–18), while humans 'rule' (*radah*) all the creatures that inhabit sea, air, and land (1:26 and 28)."[45] This primal role of humankind is given because it reflects something of the role of God shared through the *imago Dei* within humanity given in 1:27.

John Navone gives four divine qualities that comprise the *imago Dei*. While these are in no way exhaustive, they provide phenomenological framework on which to understand and build on understanding humanity's role as image bearer. These traits are: (1) rationality; (2) the ability to reflect both the immanent and transcendent goodness of the heavenly Father; (3) the ability to participate in the sharing and receiving of self-giving love; and (4) human parenthood modeled after the divine relationship.[46] Further, in addition to *radah* as descriptive of the mandate of humans to rule, the *imago Dei* also reflects the call to subdue or tread (*kabash*). Each of these terms constitute royal ideology—with conceptual links to these themes in places such as Pss 2, 8, 72, and 110.[47] They point to humankind as given a directive to rule in the Creator's image, to

[45] Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Sarum Theological Lectures; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 16.

[46] John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 12–13.

[47] See C. L. Crouch, "Made in the Image of God: The Creation of אדם: The Commissioning of the King and the Chaoskampf of YHWH," *JANER* 16 (2016): 1-21.

steward the inhabitants of sacred space. This kingly stewardship also includes the call to be procreative in sacred space. Again, Navone identifies here a reflection of source beauty emanating in the human royal call to creative rule.

> True love, friendship, commitment, and community are related to beauty…beauty is the quality that makes someone or something the object of possible love…if the old definition is right—*pulchrum est quod visu placet*, to be beautiful means to be "pleasing to see"—then there can be no true love without approving contemplation. The creative power of Beauty Itself is reflected in the procreative power of human beauty and sexual attraction. The reciprocal attractiveness of beauty of male and female is the starting point for most human life stories. Human existence itself evidences the life-giving power of divine and human beauty. To be or not to be is the question of beauty and its motivating power.[48]

This call to reciprocity in beauty through love and creative expression (including procreation) constitutes the peak of royal rule within sacred space. This will manifest itself more fully in the priestly gardener role in Gen 2 and is part of the tragedy of the Fall in Gen 3 when this beautification is unrealized—due to a break in hierarchy of replacing reflected beauty with source beauty. To "have dominion" or "rule" is understood in this reading—considering the prior discussion on order in sacred space—as tender promotion of creational integrity through maintenance of spatiality, recognition of uniqueness of each inhabitant and its role in beautification for glorification (reflected in Adam's naming the animals in Gen 2:19) and ordering the remnants of *tehom* within sacred space through the task of intracreational development of creation's aesthetic potential.[49]

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[48] John Navone, *Toward a Theology of Beauty*, 25.

[49] Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," 346. It is possible that the lingering *tehom* represents a form of unrealized completion of sacred space. From a Christian theological perspective, this makes sense of the removal of night along with the brilliant illumination of sacred space (new creation) deriving from source beauty, which occurs with the consummation of the new Adam in Rev 22:5.

SABBATH INHABITATION AS COMPLETION OF BEAUTIFYING SACRED SPACE

The form of Gen 1 concludes with two acts of beauty which brought the ordering of sacred space to its finish. First, at the end of day six, God declares the formed cosmos as "very good" in Gen 1:31. This evaluative summation of the newly realized form of creation from formless void to harmonious beautification of the cosmos in six days consists of an aesthetic judgement.[50] This is so because the sacred space corresponds to a cosmic tabernacle for God's glory. The language of Gen 1 finds many parallels to Exod 25–31 with the construction of the Mosaic Tabernacle—a central space of beauty reserved for the worship of God.

Second, God rested on the seventh day from his work. Central to the completion of form is the rhythm of time within spatialization. While each day (*yôm*) brought with it an equal spatial ordering and inhabit in balance within an evening and a morning sequence, the seventh day is the day without comparison. Humanity represented the peak created inhabitant through the bestowal of the *imago Dei* culminating at the end of day six. However, the seventh day is what the narrative is building to. It is open ended, lacking the evening and morning sequence. Further, it signifies the culmination of aesthetic splendor. On the seventh day (what would come to be known as the Sabbath), all aspects of beauty are manifest in form and purpose as indicated through blessing of the seventh day—blessing being an expression of the first trinitarian act of creation manifest in self-giving in solidarity with sacred space and its inhabitants. God sanctifies a Sabbath tabernacle within sacred space that coheres a thin space between God's realm and the womb of the earth. Therefore, on Sabbath, spatialization is found within a time-structure that

[50] See discussion of the metaphor of Yahweh as an artist in Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 251.

develops form for aesthetic appreciation through praise by its inhabitants in solidarity with God as immanent in the sacred space tabernacle.

> Thus, the resting is best understood as the enjoyment of a position of sovereign rule in a cosmic temple, after the quelling of chaotic forces [i.e. *tehom*] … God has "blessed the seventh day and set it apart" so that his people would commemorate his assumption of kingship and beginning rule over the cosmic temple, which he had created. Before the Mosaic era, at the least, God's people would commemorate God's seventh day of beginning rule probably through some kind of worshipful acts.[51]

The aesthetic purpose of being culminates in the seventh day. On this day, God inhabits the sacred space of his creation to dwell in solidarity with his inhabitants. On this day, everything responds back in aesthetic celebration for the goodness and beauty found in the form of creation through displaying its own quality as both good and beautiful. But more importantly, beauty in glorification is the gift offered back from the community of creation for the self-giving love and beauty of the one who is Beauty Himself. This offering of creative beauty in playful rest and aesthetic harmony is not subject to the delimitations of evening and morning time structures. Rather, this is the ultimate and eternal purpose of sacred space and its inhabitants: the glory of God alone (*Soli Deo Gloria*).

CONCLUSION

This essay maintains that a Christian faith which leaves concepts of the beautiful unapproached will lack three vital areas of faith. First, pursuing a theology of beauty is a necessity to understanding the nature and work of the God of which the psalmist writes that "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the

[51] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 797.

days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple" (Ps 27:4 ESV). Second, neglecting this pursuit leaves faith communities without a central characteristic of early Christian identity: awe-filled wonder (as in Acts 2:43). Thomas Troeger warns that amid a society filled with fear:

> The heart longs for a vision of divine beauty, and when the church fails to attend to beauty, the life of faith often becomes grim and onerous. We distort the image of God in ourselves and in our understanding of God's character, often concentrating on the power and might of God to the neglect of other divine attributes. An unimaginative and aesthetically starved faith not only diminishes God, it also diminishes us. We are no longer all that God made us to be.[52]

Third, failure to pursue a theological vision of beauty fails to address issues of ontological significance to Christian being in the world. This essay contends that a biblical theology of beauty is sorely lacking, yet it is vital to a full articulation of the nature and purpose of God and creational being in the world. Aesthetics have the potential to help communities—both academic and ecclesial—to employ imagination in new and creative ways that help these communities realize divine reality.[53]

This work makes strides towards the foundations of a biblical theology of beauty by employing an aesthetic reading of Gen 1:1–2:4. In this section, readers notice the interplay of themes such as artistry expressed through the pericope's exalted literary structure—the purpose of which is to evoke awe. Further, themes such as self-giving as the primordial first act of beauty, fashioning creation *ex nihilo*, spatialization for aesthetic distance, ordering of sacred space as form, contrast, illumination, and inhabitants which beautify sacred space for the glory of God all provide aesthetic themes from which to further develop a biblical theology of beauty.

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[52] Thomas Troeger, "The Necessity of Beauty," *Reflections* (Spring 2015): 14.

[53] Stephen M. Garrett, "God's Beauty-in-Act: An Artful Renewal of Human Imagining," *IJST* 14 (2012): 475.

Scholars may see—with poet Gerard Manley Hopkins—that "Christ plays in ten thousand places, lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his, to the Father through the features of men's faces."[54] Moving toward a theology of beauty may yet help biblical scholarship reclaim a component of life and faith that poets and artists have sought to tell all along: the beauty and resplendence of God's glory. (*SDG*)

[54] Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Poems and Prose* (W.H. Gardner, 1953; repr., London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 51.

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