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“Work as Worship in the Garden and the Workshop: Genesis 1-3, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and Liturgical Hermeneutics.”

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Work as Worship in the Garden and the Workshop

Genesis 1–3, the Feast of St. Joseph
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THEOLOGY IS IN DIRE STRAITS because of the fragmentation of the theological disciplines. The most tragic of all is arguably the chasm between theology and biblical studies. Throughout Christian history, theologians were nothing other than interpreters of Scripture. The challenge today of reuniting theology and the Bible, of making biblical studies more theological and theology more biblical, is an urgent one. David Fagerberg explains that “our task is to let the connection between liturgy, Scripture and theology be a path to a thickened understanding of each of them. That is what we have ceased doing because we no longer see these three in the light of the singular mystery of God.”¹ In this context, the Church’s liturgy emerges as an important site for studying Scripture, and for making such study theological. This present article is a modest attempt at contributing to the reunification of the Bible and theology by highlighting the promise contained in a liturgical hermeneutic for accomplishing this goal. As a concrete example, I have chosen the theme of work as worship within Genesis 1–3, and as read in light of the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker. I begin with a discussion of the liturgical content and structure of Genesis 1–3.² I then put forward

both historical and theological reasons for reading Scripture liturgically.³ I conclude by picking up on the theme of work as worship in Genesis 1–3 as read and experienced in the context of the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker to show what such a liturgical hermeneutic might look like.

The Liturgical Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1–3

Genesis 1–3 depicts the world as a macro-temple, and humanity as created for liturgical worship as cosmic-priests on earth, which suggests a liturgical *Sitz im Leben* (situation or setting in life).⁴ Ever since Henning Bernhard Witter (1711) and Jean Astruc (1753), scholars have argued for two different sources underlying Genesis 1–3.⁵ The first portion, namely, Genesis 1:1–2:3, is usually taken as the later priestly account (P), whereas the second portion, Genesis 2:4–3:24, is understood as an earlier Yahwistic account (J).⁶ A century after Astruc, Hermann Hupfeld (1853) became the first to isolate the priestly source (which he called the “older Elohist”), even though a long tradition had already developed for over a century distinguishing between the two accounts of creation.⁷

These critical distinctions concerning foundational sources notwithstanding, liturgical concerns link both accounts in their final form. Form critics like Moshe Weinfeld have underscored numerous priestly and liturgical elements in the first creation account.⁸ The emphasis on the seventh day reflects priestly concerns for Sabbath observance.⁹ Not only is the seventh day the narrative climax, but there is a sevenfold dimension to the three formulae involved in creation: fulfillment, description, and approval. This sevenfold structure is retained through the omission of specific formulae where we might expect them. In Genesis 1:6–8 there is no approval formula “God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:9 omits any description of the act whatsoever. Finally, Genesis 1:20 omits the fulfillment formula, “and it was so.” The significance of these omissions is highlighted by the fact that the Greek Septuagint (LXX) fills in

these missing formulae; the sevenfold structure of the Hebrew text is thus lacking in the LXX.¹⁰

The priestly and liturgical nature of the creation account is further indicated by its many parallels with the priestly account of the construction of the tabernacle, which is portrayed as the chief liturgical structure in the book of Exodus.¹¹ There are nearly identical Hebrew phrases linking both passages, and both are structured with the heptadic pattern of the number seven.¹² More recently, Crispin Fletcher-Louis's textual analysis of Sirach indicates that Sirach relies upon a tradition of interpretation that assumes the parallels between creation and tabernacle construction.¹³

Unsurprisingly, in the biblical canon these accounts orient readers toward the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem under Solomon.¹⁴ This passage parallels those of Genesis and Exodus, primarily inasmuch as the account is based upon a heptadic sevenfold structure.¹⁵ Moreover, this practice of connecting creation stories with temple-building extends beyond the Hebrew tradition. Scholars of the ancient Near East have shown how temples were often connected to acts of creation, from the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* to the Sumerian Gudea Cylinders.¹⁶ As John Bergsma explains, "In the ancient Near East it was an almost universal commonplace that any given temple mystically represented the great 'cosmic mountain' that was the first to break above the primordial waters of the abyss at creation, and rose to form the habitable land."¹⁷

Although the priestly character of Genesis 1:1–2:3 has been well established for over a century, some scholars like Gordon Wenham have also emphasized priestly and liturgical elements in Genesis 2 and 3.¹⁸ This is particularly the case with the imagery found in Genesis 2 and 3 that form associations with the tabernacle and Temple: that is, Adam is told to 'ābād "work" and shāmār "guard" the garden (2:15), using precisely those two verbs that in the Pentateuch only occur together again with the task the Levites are given in their tabernacle service (Nm 3:7–8; 8:26; and 18:5–6); the depiction of God walking back and forth in both the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:8)