

Creation, temple and magic. A magico-mythical reading of Genesis 1

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ABSTRACT

This is the second article in a series to investigate the interrelationship between myth, magic, ritual, and the sacred within the Old Testament. In this contribution the link between creation and temple, the emphasis on the order of creation and the concept of Imagio Dei are explained in terms of magical linkage. Gadamer's hermeneutics is used to explore the different horizons of reader and text and to illuminate the potential problems contemporary readers may have in recognising magical thinking within the Old Testament.

A THE LINK BETWEEN CREATION AND TEMPLE

It has long been known to scholars that creation and temple-building were often linked in the Ancient Near East and that the temple was “symbolically” seen as the whole world (Eliade 1996 [1949]:194-201; Fisher 1965:319). Creation of the world is depicted in Ugarit and Babylon as the outcome of a battle between the gods, resulting in the new kingship of the victorious god (i.e. Baal and Marduk respectively). The first thing the new king of the gods did was to build a heavenly palace or temple for himself and to elect a new earthly king and dynasty to represent him on earth. The elected earthly king then imitated the action of the god by constructing a temple on earth in which the god could reside and be worshipped.¹ What is even more interesting is that it was believed that the god gave instructions about the construction of the earthly temple to ensure that it would be an exact replica or mirror image of the heavenly temple. The belief was therefore that the earthly temple had a special link to both the heavenly temple and the cosmos as a whole.² That these links between tabernacle/temple on the one hand and the heavens/cosmos on the other hand may also have played a role in the thoughts of Israel is more than probable.

B HOW TO READ ANCIENT TEXTS

But why did this link between creation and temple-building exist in the Ancient Near East, and why was it essential that the tabernacle and temple should be replicas of the heavenly abode of God? The purpose of this article is to investi-

¹ Cf. Kapelrud 1963:56-68.

² Fisher (1965:319): “Hence the new king has a temple which is a microcosm and the ordering of the temple resembles the creation of the cosmos.”

gate these questions and to suggest that a magico-mythical³ interpretation of Old Testament texts, in accordance with Gadamer's hermeneutics, could provide an appropriate framework for answering these questions. We will first discuss Gadamer's suggestions for interpreting ancient texts.

How do we understand ancient texts like Genesis 1-11 – far removed from us both in time and culture? The answer to this question is especially important when attempting to understand the Old Testament accounts of creation and temple building and to explore possible reasons why the “otherness” of the biblical text is often not sufficiently recognised by contemporary readers.

When reading the creation narratives a number of possibilities are open to the reader. The following are some of them:

- *A rationalised reading of the text.* These kinds of readings insist, to a more or lesser extent, that the text is authoritative with regard to some or all of its scientific details. Proponents of this type of reading often point out that certain details of the creation narrative concur with known scientific facts.⁴ Such rationalisations may vary from extremely naïve and fundamentalist to isolated lapses into rationalisation, while acknowledging that a pre-scientific worldview underlies the text.⁵ The rationalised reading of the text wishes to understand the text more or less literal, which either totally denies the otherness of its magico-mythical horizon or does not take sufficient cognisance of it.
- *Rejection of the pre-scientific view* of the biblical creation narratives and denial that it has any kind of authority (the atheist or sceptic approach).⁶ These kinds of readings may fully recognise the magico-mythical horizon of the text, but refuse to engage in any real discussion between text and reader. This fact unfortunately short-circuits the process of understanding, because it makes the fusion of horizons difficult if not impossible.
- *Symbolic interpretation.* Proponents of this view acknowledge the fact that the text's pre-scientific perspective is outdated, but maintain that it may still be authoritative if interpreted in an allegoric or symbolic way

³ The term “magico-mythical” will be used to emphasise the fact that magic and myth are closely linked within the pre-scientific worldview of the Old Testament.

⁴ E.g. Neyman (accessed November 2008). He interprets the chaos mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as follows: “In verse 2, the earth has just formed into a planet, and is simply one jumbled mass of material with no apparent form.”

⁵ This is probably the case, for example, with the interpretation of Genesis 1:1 by Wellhausen and Ridderbos. Cf. Westermann 1976:151.

⁶ Cf. Dawkins 2006:92-97.

(Oosterhoff 1972).⁷ The problem with a symbolic interpretation of the creation myths is that mythical texts were meant to be understood literally by its original readers and not symbolically (Van Dyk 2001:51-52). By interpreting such texts in a symbolic way therefore goes against the “grain of the text”.⁸

A fourth possibility is offered by the hermeneutics suggested by Gadamer (1989). He criticised the notion of 19th century Romantic exegetes that a temporal gulf exists between ancient texts and the current reader and that this gap can only be bridged if the reader subjectively transposes him or herself into the mind of the original author.⁹ Rather than trying to read the mind of the original author one should transpose oneself (Gadamer 1989:292) “into the *perspective* within which he [the author] has formed his views” (author’s emphasis).

To explain the interaction between text and reader, Gadamer suggested that the contemporary reader should take into account the horizon (framework) of the text and that of the reader. Readers should therefore not “try to see the past solely in terms of itself” (Pickering 1999:181). The situation in which the current reader is embedded, and the situation within which the text was produced, are both important when attempting to understand the text. By constructing both horizons of text and reader, the Old Testament exegete can come to a “fusion” of horizons which makes understanding possible.

Gadamer argues against the notion that an unbridgeable gap exists between the horizons of the contemporary reader and that of the ancient text, but emphasises that both horizons ultimately form part of one larger horizon – linked by tradition. By emphasising the commonalities between the two horizons, he does not want to minimise the temporal distance between text and reader, but wishes to argue that it is possible that “a fusion of horizons” can take place.¹⁰

⁷ It is interesting to note that the Greek philosopher Chrysippus (3rd century B.C.E.) already interpreted the Homeric poems in an allegoric or symbolic way “to eliminate offensive material from a religious text” (Gadamer 1989:73).

⁸ Clines (1992:82-83), however, argues from a reader-response perspective that it is not required from readers to necessarily read texts always with their grain, but that reading against the grain is sometimes necessary.

⁹ Gadamer’s (1989:292) criticism of Schleiermacher’s romantic ideas should equally be applied to Old Testament *Formgeschichte* which described the purpose of exegesis as trying to understand the intention of the original author (Kraus 1982:365).

¹⁰ It is important to appreciate that Gadamer (1989:306) does not view the horizon of the text and the horizon of the reader as two totally separate horizons which need to be brought together, but rather as one larger horizon. Speaking of two horizons is merely a temporary theoretical abstraction: “There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired.

His emphasis on the traditional nature of texts is especially important when reading mythological texts such as the Genesis creation narratives. Such a traditional understanding does not want to deny the individuality of a text, but wishes to acknowledge that no author (and no reader) can be seen as standing completely outside his or her traditional framework or *Zeitgeist*.¹¹

In contrast to the Enlightenment's ideal of so-called "objective" interpretation without prejudices, Gadamer (1989:276) argues that it is exactly such prejudices that enable the reader to form a pre-notion of the meaning of the text (i.e. through the process of moving tradition). This is seen as an essential part of the process of understanding a text. Prejudices are essential, but should always be tested and challenged as the process of understanding progresses. This implies that readers should constantly adapt and correct their prejudices, which is only possible if readers maintain an openness towards the text. We should acknowledge the limits of the cultural horizon in which we move and be prepared for creative "disillusionment". This means that we constantly have to call into question that which we bring to the process of understanding. This critical attitude will enable us to hear the question which historical horizons call into being (Pickering 1999:184).

Readers of texts should constantly guard against adapting the past over-hastily to their own expectations. Only then can we listen to the past in a way that permits it to make its own meaning heard (Gadamer 1989:305). This will allow us to become aware of our own prejudices and preconceptions and how these may influence our understanding of a text.

The traditional nature of the biblical creation narratives and the temporal

Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves." Also: "If, however, there is no such thing as these distinct horizons, why do we speak of the fusion of horizons and not simply of the formation of the one horizon, whose bounds are set in the depths of tradition?" (Gadamer 1989:306). Gadamer answers his question by stating that this temporary projection of an historical horizon is necessary because of the tension that always exist between the text and the present and adds: "it [i. e. the reader's horizon] is itself ... only something superimposed upon continuing tradition, and hence it immediately recombines with what it has foregrounded itself from in order to become one with itself again in the unity of the historical horizon that it thus acquires."

¹¹ The extent to which individuality shines through in a specific text may vary with genre and linguistic conventions: In the case of poetry and creative literature, individuality is usually essential to the genre, but in the case of scientific or traditional texts (i. e. folklore) individuality may be minimal, while scientific and traditional conventions may be more important (Gjesdal 2006:141). It has long been appreciated by Old Testament exegetes that the primeval history (Genesis 1-11) should be interpreted as traditional material. It was especially since the ground breaking works of Hermann Gunkel that many Old Testament scholars started to take the "*traditionsgeschichtlichen Perspektiven*" seriously (Kraus 1982: 455).

distance between text and reader, make Gadamer's hermeneutics all the more important when reading texts. In the past too many Old Testament exegetes have fallen exactly into the traps warned against by Gadamer: That is, by not sufficiently examining their own horizons (with all its post-Enlightenment prejudices), and by not allowing themselves to sufficiently experience the "otherness" of the biblical text. This fact has often led either to an overhasty reading of their own expectations into the text, or to overhasty removal of so-called "undesirable elements" from the text (e.g. by "demythologising" the text),¹² before first investigating its meaning to the fullest extent.

Next we will do a critical construction of both the post-Enlightenment horizon of the reader and the pre-scientific (e.g. magico-mythical) horizon of the biblical text.

C THE POST-ENLIGHTENMENT HORIZON OF THE READER

What prejudices do we bring from our post-Enlightenment horizon to the interpretative process and how may these hamper our understanding of the creation narratives? This is a critical question that has to be answered before attempting to construct the text's horizon.

The term "Age of Enlightenment" is generally used to refer to a movement that developed in Western European philosophy during the 18th century, as a direct outflow of the preceding Renaissance or Age of Rationalism (17th century) (Gay 1966:3). Due to the many similarities between Renaissance and Enlightenment they are often considered as one large movement which shared some basic interests.

Central to both the Renaissance and Enlightenment was their emphasis on reason (rational thinking) as the only source of truth or knowledge. This focus on reason was in direct opposition to the irrationality and, what they called, the superstition and tyranny of the Middle Ages (Gay 1966:34). The scholars of the Enlightenment saw their rational framework as a definite break with the previous magico-mythical framework which was dominant in the Ancient world and during the Middle Ages.¹³ The Renaissance and Enlightenment could further be described as a "new classicism", because they revived the cri-

¹² Cf. Bultmann (1984:9). Although Bultmann should be commended for clearly exposing the mythological horizon of the Bible, one should ask if he did not strip the biblical text far too quickly from its mythological bias, without allowing a proper Gadamer-like fusion of horizons to take place between the mythological horizon of the biblical text and the post-Enlightenment horizon of the contemporary reader.

¹³ Gadamer (1989:273) describes this view of the Enlightenment as the "conquest of mythos by logos" and as the "progressive retreat of magic in the world." In this case I am willing to go as far as to describe this break in thought as a paradigm shift (Kuhn 1962), bearing in mind my earlier criticism (cf. Van Dyk 2002:173) of Kuhn's idea of paradigm shifts in general.

tique of the classical Greek philosophers (i. e. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle) of the magico-mythical worldview of their times.¹⁴

The emphasis on rationality was instrumental in the development of the scientific method and of what is today sometimes called “modernism”.¹⁵ When using the term “post-Enlightenment” we will refer to the rational scientific worldview which became dominant during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and is today more or less shared by most contemporary readers – at least within the educated Western world.

Within scientific and rational thought there is an inseparable link between cause and effect. Effects are explained only in terms of “physical” causes and not in terms of the constant “interference” of the gods, or as the result of supposedly magical forces. According to this scientific worldview, natural phenomena like the weather, the cycling of the planets and the tides, as well as historical events should not be explained in terms of supernatural causes, but rather as the direct result of physical forces only. Congruent with this scientific view about the “mechanics” of the cosmos, various cosmologies were proposed since Aristotle, which were based solely on visual observations and rational deductions¹⁶ and are diametrically opposed to the magico-mythical cosmology of the Bible.

Within a post-Enlightenment horizon it is inconceivable that magical forces played any role in the origin or course of the universe, or that such magical order was established during creation. This “prejudice” against all kind of superstition (including magic and magical thinking) is probably one of the most important standpoints that came forth from the Renaissance and Enlight-

¹⁴ Cf. Gay 1966:34: “The Enlightenment’s conception of history as a continuing struggle between two types of mentalities implies a general scheme of periodization. The philosophes divided the past roughly into four great epochs: the great river civilizations of the Near East; ancient Greece and Rome; the Christian millennium; and modern times . . . These four epochs were rhythmically related to each other: the first and third were paired off as ages of myth, belief, and superstition, while the second and fourth were ages of rationality, science, and enlightenment.”

¹⁵ Although Toulmin (1990:45) describes modernism as a “counter Renaissance”, because of what he perceives as its reductionism, we will use the terms “modernism” and “modern” not in any negative sense, but merely to describe the scientific worldview that originated during the Renaissance and Enlightenment and persists to this day.

¹⁶ Cf. Hawking (1988:2-5): Aristotle already made sound observations and deduced from those that the earth was spherical in nature. The Ancient Greeks even calculated with a surprising degree of accuracy the circumference of the earth. The next major advance in cosmology was made when Galileo proposed that the sun (and not the earth) was the centre of our solar system. Today the “big bang” cosmology is the most widely accepted scientific theory about the origin of the cosmos and its expanding nature.

enment (Gadamer 1989:273).

As a consequence of this negative view of magic, well-known scholars of religion such as Tylor (1924:417-502) and Frazer (1957:63-79) saw magic as an earlier element of so-called primitive religions, while “higher” religions have (according to them) “fortunately” outgrown these primitive beliefs. Magic was thereby regarded as the “unwanted cousin of religion” (Pinch 1994:12).

Even though interest in magic has recently resurfaced in Western culture (cf. Pezzoli-Olgiatti 2007:3), many biblical scholars have remained reluctant to acknowledge a magico-mythical framework (horizon) within the Bible and have restricted their discussion of magic to what can be regarded as “isolated relics” of magic within the Bible.¹⁷ This negative evaluation of magic has caused, what Gadamer (1989:277) would call an “illegitimate bias” towards magic in the biblical text, which has severely hampered its interpretation.

But what if the belief in magic is an essential part of the biblical horizon? Is it not our Post-Enlightenment horizon which prevents us from acknowledging this fact? The evolutionary schema of Tylor and Frazer has also been criticised by recent scholars of religion, on the basis that magic should rather be viewed as a persistent element within all religions, even so-called “higher” religions (Pinch 1994:12; Römer 2003:12-13; Laus 2003:143).

In the light of this “illegitimate bias” against magic it is essential that contemporary readers should acknowledge this danger and open themselves to the “otherness” of the biblical text, which may include the belief in magic. In the following section we will argue that the Priestly creation narrative (Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a) the details about the construction of the tabernacle (Exodus 25-32) and temple-building (1 Kings 6) should be interpreted in terms of a magico-mythical horizon and that many elements of these texts can only be properly understood if this fact is acknowledged.

D THE NATURE OF MAGICO-MYTHICAL LINKS

The term “magico-mythical” horizon refers to a framework or worldview, closely linked to mythical texts. Myths presuppose magical links that exist between heaven and earth and between “mythically linked” phenomena on earth (Van Dyk 2005:868). What distinguishes myths from other traditional texts (e. g. folksagas and legends) is the fact that they often deal with the origin of magico-mythical links and regard them as embedded within the “order” of

¹⁷ Cf. Klutz (2003) and Labahn & Peerbolte (2007). Both books brought together a number of contributions with regard to the belief in magic in the Bible and the Ancient Near Eastern world, but no attempt was made to try and understand the belief in magic as an essential element of the biblical horizon.

creation.¹⁸

In contrast to “mere” symbolic links, people sharing a magico-mythical horizon regard mythical links just as real as physical causes and effects (Van Dyk 2005:869-870). Frazer (1957:63-64) formulated it as follows:

Wherever sympathetic magic occurs ... it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science; underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm, in the order and uniformity of nature.

According to Frazer (1957:14) the logic of sympathetic magic depends on two related laws: The Law of Similarity, which states that similarity between objects links them in a magical sense:

like produces like ... an effect resembles its cause ... the magician infers that he can produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it;

and the Law of Contagion which he explains as follows:

things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed.

Magical and symbolic links are therefore totally different from one another, although the two can easily be confused and magical links can sometimes change into “mere” symbolic links. One can illustrate the difference between magico-mythical linkage and symbolic linkage by using the example of the Israelite tabernacle.

In Exodus 40:34 it is stated that the glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle like a cloud and that Moses could not enter the tabernacle because of this holiness or “cloud”. If, for argument’s sake, we regard this tradition as unhistorical (i.e. it did not really happen) what difference would it make to the believer? It depends on how the believer reads the text: either as symbolic or as literal. If the link between the heavens (Yahweh) and the tabernacle was seen as merely symbolic, then the unhistorical nature of the tradition would not really matter to the believer. As long as the tabernacle remains a reminder of Yahweh’s presence, it can keep on functioning as an effective symbol of God’s presence.

However, if the link between Yahweh and the tabernacle was under-

¹⁸ See for example the Egyptian concept of Ma’at or order and the P-source’s emphasis on the order of creation.

stood in terms of sympathetic magic (“Law of Contagion”), a real historical connection between Yahweh and the tabernacle would be considered as absolutely essential by the believer. If the contact between Yahweh and tabernacle did not happen, contagion could not have occurred and a magical link would not have been established. The logic of magic therefore works similar to that of science: a real physical effect cannot occur if the cause was imaginary.

It is further important to note that the sacredness of an object such as the tabernacle depended on its magical link to God.¹⁹ If this sacredness is violated in any way this violation has immediate negative repercussions for the violator.²⁰

In the following section it will be argued that the recognition of a magico-mythical horizon is important when reading the biblical texts (with regard to creation, tabernacle and temple) and that it can explain the important link which existed in the Ancient Near East between creation and temple building.

E A MAGICO-MYTHICAL READING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Three topics will be considered while assessing the possible role a magico-mythical worldview may have played in the biblical texts. These are: How the link between creation and temple was perceived, the creation of order, and the *Imago Dei* concept in Genesis 1.

1 The nature of the link between creation and temple

As suggested in the introduction, the link between tabernacle/temple on the one side and cosmos/heavenly temple on the other side has been recognised and explored in some detail by previous scholars. As argued earlier, myths such as Genesis 1 were not understood in a symbolic way, but interpreted as literal truth.²¹ The fact that the link between temple and creation was perceived as real and magical (rather than symbolic), will be argued next.

¹⁹ The close link between a belief in magic and what is considered as sacred or holy falls outside the scope of this article and needs to be explored in more detail.

²⁰ E. g. in 2 Samuel 6:2-9 Uzzah is immediately killed when he touched the Ark. Bohak (2008:28) argues: “Such passages provide ample evidence of the immense power associated with God’s holiest objects, and certainly explain why not everybody was allowed to handle such objects, and why even authorized personnel had to take extreme precautions and observe strict rules of purity and propriety in order to approach any space or artifact connected with God.”

²¹ Also see Von Rad (1963:45) with regard to Genesis 1: “Nowhere at all is the text only allusive, ‘symbolic,’ or figuratively poetic.”

A symbolic interpretation does not explain why the tabernacle or temple was perceived as sacred (i. e. “ganz andere”).²² It makes much more sense if the sacredness of the temple is explained in terms of the fact that God’s presence within the temple was perceived as real. If God’s presence in the temple was perceived as real, then this can explain why it was regarded as sacred and different from profane space.²³

The Hebrew term tabernacle *משכן* has the meaning of “to live in,” implying that Yahweh’s presence in the tabernacle was seen as real and special. If the tabernacle and other holy places were perceived as being magically linked to the heavens and cosmos, this would explain why the worshipper could “consult” and sacrifice to Yahweh at these holy places as if he was really present. For example, Exodus 20:24 states: “Wherever I cause my name to be honoured, I will come to you and bless you.” This passage can be explained in terms of sympathetic magic: By blessing a place God establishes a magical link (a form of contagion), making it holy and a fit place where sacrifices could be offered. The presence of God in a sacred place was seen as more special than his general omniscience within profane space. This fits in with the concept that the tabernacle was magically linked to God and thereby became a real portal to the heavens.

One can illustrate the mechanics of this magico-mythical link with the following modern example: When people participate in a global video conference, each one of the participants can hear and see the other participants in real time (or almost real time). In a sense the participants can be regarded as being in the presence of one another. In this example the links which bring the participants together are real physical links (i.e. electro-magnetic waves). Magical links between the temple, on the one side, and the heavens (or cosmos) on the other side, were perceived by the ancients as just as real and immediate as the electro-magnetic waves in this example. The only difference is that magical links are not physical in nature, but they were regarded as supernatural or magical forces. In this way a person entering the temple, or sacred sphere, was entering a portal which brought him or her into the real heavenly temple and presence of God.

The importance attributed to the similarities between heavenly temple and earthly temple can be explained in terms of the “Law of Similarity”. In terms of the logic of magical thinking, only a real similarity between two objects could produce a magical link. This would explain why Moses was shown

²² Cf. Eliade (1957:7): “Das Heilige manifestiert sich immer als eine Realität, die von ganz andere Art ist als die <natürlichen> Realitäten.”

²³ Cf. Durkheim’s (1996 [1915]: 188-193) discussion regarding the separation of the sacred from the profane.

in Exodus 25:9 and 26:30 a model of the heavenly temple so that he could build the tabernacle to mimic it.²⁴

The amount of attention given to the exact measurements and structure of the tabernacle and temple (1 Kings 6) also suggests that they were of extraordinary importance. This can again be explained in terms of magic: By meticulously ensuring that the earthly tabernacle or temple looked like the heavenly example, magical links were established between the earthly temple and the heavens or cosmos through a process of sympathetic magic.

The link between creation and temple building is further illustrated by the fact that the Jerusalem temple showed many similarities with the cosmos, which was again linked to the heavenly temple (Albright 1946:144-154). For example, the careful East-West orientation aligned the temple with the earth, the two columns (Boaz and Jakin) in front of the temple were probably seen as the equivalent of the two cosmic pillars on the eastern horizon:²⁵ the “molten sea” or metal basin outside the temple was seen as analogous to the deep or primeval sea.²⁶

The above examples show that the close link between creation, temple and cosmos can best be explained if understood in terms of sympathetic magic.

2 The creation of order

In Genesis 1:1-2:4a creation is depicted by the Priestly author as the creation of order from chaos (Von Rad 1966:49). The uncreated cosmos is not depicted in Genesis 1:1-2 as a void where nothing existed (*creation ex nihilo*), but as matter without form or order.²⁷ God created the cosmos by establishing order. This is illustrated by the fact that he separated the waters of heaven from the waters below and the dry ground from the waters of the deep (Genesis 1: 6-10). It is further emphasised that the plants contained their seeds within them, each according to its kind (Genesis 1:12) and that the heavenly lights were created to “rule” the seasons and day and night (Genesis 1:14-18). Also the animals are created according to their kind (Genesis 1:21, 24), while humans were made to be God’s representatives on earth and to “rule over” the animals (Genesis 1:26, 28).

²⁴ In Ps 104:2-3 it is stated that “God spanned the heavenly dome open like a canvas tent and made himself a dwelling above the heavenly waters above it.” It was probably this dwelling of God that was shown to Moses.

²⁵ In Egypt the cosmic pillars were imagined as two sycamore trees on the eastern horizon where the sun god Re appeared each morning.

²⁶ Similar metal basins existed in the Babylonian temples and were called “Apsu”, which is the name of the god of freshwater in the Babylonian pantheon.

²⁷ Both the Greeks and the Ancients believed that formless matter (water, wind and fire) was not created (e. g. Aristotle 1984:512-554).

All these verses imply that certain laws of nature were created, that is, order was established. This basic view of creation as establishing order, agrees with that of other creation narratives in the Ancient Near East. For example, in Egyptian cosmology *ma'at* or order was one of the most important aspects of the cosmos created by the creator god (Van Dyk 2001:46). Even though it is probably impossible to say to what extent these laws of nature were perceived as a natural (physical) order or as a magical order, it is highly probable that at least some were perceived as magical in nature.²⁸ The fact that God established these forces could suggest a form of contagion, essential in establishing magical links. Circumstantial evidence from other Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, where both physical and magical forces were seen as part of the created order (Pinch 1994:9), may suggest that this may also have been the view within Israelite cosmology.

If it is further accepted that the heavenly bodies (sun and moon) were not perceived as deities (personal powers) in Genesis 1 (Von Rad 1966:53; Westermann 1976:176), then the usage of the word “rule” to describe the function of the sun and moon (Genesis 1:16), is rather a strong term. Westermann (1976:176) explains it as follows: “[D]ies ist nicht mehr Herrschaft in vollem Sinn, sondern eine begrenzte bloße Funktion.” But can it be interpreted as describing a mere physical function? Or is this bias determined by our modern scientific worldview? The word “rule” would make much more sense if the heavenly bodies were perceived within a magical framework as exerting impersonal powers (i. e. magical forces) over day and night and the seasons. This is entirely plausible when one considers the fact that these magical forces were regarded as just as real within ancient “science” than physical forces in modern physical science of cause and effect.

In Genesis 2:2-3 the Priestly author is concerned with another order of creation: the fact that the seventh day (Sabbath) is special, that is, separate, holy and linked to God. Again the link between God and Sabbath came about during creation and can be interpreted as another example of the Law of Contagion: God did not arbitrarily choose one day to be special or a symbolic reminder of his creative work. The link came about because of a real occurrence: the fact that God rested on the seventh day after creation. This determined the character of the Sabbath (as a day of rest) and also established the magico-mythical link between God and Sabbath and made it a sacred time.

3 Imago Dei

In Genesis 1:26 it is stated by the P-source that humans were created in the “image” of God. Although the interpretation of this verse has caused much controversy amongst Old Testament exegetes (Westermann 1976:202-214) the

²⁸ It is not obvious to what extent a clear differentiation was made within magico-mythical worldviews between natural and magical forces.

verse makes sense if interpreted from a magico-mythical perspective. The physical similarity, which is the most literal meaning of the word (Von Rad 1966:56), between humans and God can be explained in terms of sympathetic magic (i. e. the law of similarity). The fact that humans are physically similar to God establishes a magical link between God and humans, which would explain why humans have special access to God and could be regarded as God's representatives on earth (Von Rad 1966:58).

This magical interpretation of the *Imago Dei* has the further advantage of closely linking up with the fact that humans are described earlier in the verse as the representatives of God. According to the logic of magic the argument of Genesis 1:26 therefore runs as follows: Humans are magically linked to God, because they are similar looking (Law of Similarity). Due to this special link, humans can be described as God's representatives on earth and He can act through them in the same way than through any other magical link.²⁹ This magical interpretation of the *Imago Dei* also fits the description in Genesis 1:28 that humans were to rule over the animals as God's representatives.

F CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that, as argued above, the link between creation and temple, the emphasis on the order of creation and the concept of *Imago Dei* can best be explained within a magico-mythical framework and not as a form of symbolism. The belief in magic in Old Testament times was not restricted to unofficial and subversive forms of religion, but formed the essential background for understanding the relationship between the heavens and the earth and between God and humans. Creation, temple building and magic are all closely linked.

The magico-mythical link between the earth, heavens and cosmos can only be fully appreciated when the "stumbling blocks" caused by the post-Enlightenment horizon of the contemporary reader are removed and when the "otherness" of the horizon of the biblical text is recognised. In this regard the hermeneutics of Gadamer (1989) proved to be useful in appreciating this magico-mythical horizon of the biblical text.

Much of the arguments with regard to the magico-mythical horizon and how it may influence a reading of the Old Testament, rest on circumstantial evidence. The argument in favour of magico-mythical interpretation should of

²⁹ Cf. Pinch (1994:16) with regard to magic in Egypt: "Once a pairing had been established, it was thought possible to transfer qualities from one component to the other, or to produce an effect on the one by actions performed on the other. Heka was the force that turned these connections into a kind of power network. It was through heka that an image or name could be made to stand for the real thing, a part could stand for the whole, and symbolic actions could have effects in the real world."

course be strengthened by analysing more Old Testament texts, by giving a more detailed analysis of the belief in magic in the Old Testament, and by dealing more fully with the concepts of ritual and sacredness within the Old Testament.³⁰

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³⁰ It was not possible within the scope of this article to do more than mention these concepts. A more complete exploration of them is planned for the future.

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