

Humanity Not Pronounced Good: Humanity's Death within the Scope of God's Very Good Creation in Light of Genesis 2-3

HULISANI RAMANTSWANA (UNISA)

ABSTRACT:

Genesis 3 is commonly regarded as narrating events subsequent to the “very good” creation. In contrast to the commonly held view, this article suggest that Gen 3 forms part and parcel of the creation process and thereby, the second creation narrative as a whole (Gen 2:4b–3:24) taps into the absence of the evaluative formula with regard to the human creation cycle in Gen 1:26–30. The creation process in Gen 2:4b–3:24 is presented as an “undoing” of the negatives in the initiating verse, Gen 2:5, and all the negatives introduced within the creation process with the exception of the negative in Gen 3:22. Thus humanity is not singled out as good in Gen 1:26–30 because humanity at the end of the creation process dies.

A INTRODUCTION

Genesis 3 is commonly regarded as narrating events subsequent to the “very good” creation. In this view, Gen 2:4b–3:24 is read progressively, on the one hand, as retelling the story of a “very good” creation which is concluded in Gen 2:25, and on the other hand, Gen 3 the “fall” narrative or the “crime and punishment” narrative narrates how the initially “very good” creation became distorted by the fall of humanity.¹

Gen 2:25 is usually seen as a “transition verse” or a “bridge verse” between the creation narrative and the fall narrative. However, in contrast to this commonly held view, this verse rather functions as a transition to further creation processes. The fact that Gen 2:25 describes the state of humankind in the Garden of Eden “before the fall” does not necessarily have to lead to the conclusion that the creation process is complete. In Gen 2:4b–3:24, the creation process may be properly described as an undoing of a series of the negatives, except for one negative in Gen 3:22. The undoing of a series of negatives in Gen 2:4b–3:24 operates both from outside the garden and from inside the garden, which I also refer to in this article as macro-level and micro-level. Thus, the second creation narrative as a whole with its particular focus on the creation

¹ This view finds support from both the traditional reading of Gen 1–3 and the historical critical readings of Gen 1–3. See my discussion of this view in Hulisani Ramantswana, “Humanity not Pronounced Good: A Re-Reading of Genesis 1:26–31 in Dialogue with Genesis 2–3,” *OTE* 26/2 (2013): 432–435.

of humanity arguably taps into the absence of the evaluative formula in the human creation circle in Gen 1:26–30,² thereby serving as an elaboration of as to why humanity is not singled out as "good."

B CREATION AS AN UNDOING OF THE NEGATIVES IN GENESIS 2:4b–3:24

Genesis 3 is traditionally treated with great intensity under the doctrine of the fall and original sin and not under the doctrine of creation. Such a separation of Gen 3 from Gen 2 is neither in the original Hebrew text nor in the Masoretic Text (MT) tradition, which as Magonet notes, "assumes one continuous unbroken piece of text from 2:4–3:15" with marked separations in Gen 3:15, 16, 21, and 24.³ The separations in Gen 3:15, 16, and 21 mark the judgment scenes and do not amount to complete breaks in the story. The story finds its logical conclusion in Gen 3:24. In Gen 2:4b–3:24 as will be argued below, the creation process is presented as an undoing of the negatives in Gen 2:5. The other negatives in Gen 2:17, 18, 20, 25; 3:1, 3, 11, 17, which are introduced within the process creation, contribute towards the undoing the initiating negatives with the exception of the negative in Gen 3:22.

Creation in its initial state is described using a series of negative clauses (Gen 2:5):

and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth
(2:5a)

and no plant of the field had yet sprung up (2:5b)

for the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth
(2:5c)

and there was no man to work the ground
(2:5d)

וְכֹל שִׁיחַ הַשְׂדָה טָרֵם יִהְיֶה בָּאָרֶץ

וְכֹל-עַשְׂבַּד הַשְׂדָה טָרֵם יִצְמַח

כִּי لֹא הִמְטִיר יְהֹוָה אֱלֹהִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ

וְאַדְם אֵין לְעָבֵד אֶת-הָאָדָם

Genesis 2:5 functions as the initiating verse for the plot in the second creation narrative.⁴ The negative state of creation prior to the creation process is described by employing a series of negative terms: טָרֵם, לֹא, אֵין.⁵ The crea-

² For arguments regarding the absence of evaluation formula in Gen 1:26-30, see Ramantswana, "Humanity Not Pronounced Good."

³ Jonathan Magonet, "The Themes of Genesis 2–3," in *A Walk in the Garden: Biblical, Iconographical and Literary Images of Eden* (ed. Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer; JSOTSup 136; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 39.

⁴ Terje Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden: Basic Plot in Genesis 2–3 Reconsidered," *JSOT* 53 (1992): 3–26.

⁵ Genesis 2:5, as Westermann notes, follows the "when . . . not yet" construction. The four "not yet" constructions, as Westermann argues, express the "arid, lifeless earth of the desert"; they are not an image of "nothingness" or "chaos"; rather they describe "what was not living." See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John J. Scullion; CC; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 199. The "when . . . not yet" formula appears in several other ancient Near Eastern texts: in Egyptian texts, in *Lugal-e*,

tion process on the macro level is presented as an undoing of the series of negatives in Gen 2:5. The undoing of the series of negatives in 2:5 begins with those negatives in the motivation *kî* clause (v. 5cd), the reasons why the land is without vegetation. The negatives in the *kî* clause (5cd) provide the two reasons for the two negatives in v. 5ab: no rain and no humanity.

The solutions for the negatives (or deficiencies) in the *kî* clause are worked out first from the outside and then from inside the garden; the deficiencies in 2:5ab are wrought from the inside out. There are double solutions for the negatives in 2:5. This taking into consideration that Gen 2:8, as Blum argues, functions as a proleptic summary marking a spatial shift, and in doing so, introduces an outside-inside contrast.⁶ The spatial twist in the narrative suggests that the land and the garden are two different but interrelated areas. The garden is thus a restricted area in contrast to the "the land" or the "ground" outside.

1 Undoing of 2:5c in 2:6 and 10–14: The Lord God Had Not Caused It to Rain on Earth

Solution 1 – From Outside the Garden: The negative clause pattern is broken for the first time in Gen 2:6, thereby structurally setting this verse outside of the initial state of the earth.⁷ The whole face of the ground is watered by the **תְּ**

in *Atrahasis*, in *Enuma Elish*, the *Eridu Story of Creation*, in Hesiod, and in Philo of Byblos. See Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942), 8, 50, 66. However, the "when not yet" formula was not used exclusively for creation narratives as evidenced by the text noted. As Ouro notes, "The purpose of the formula is to expose a negative situation and to define certain deficiencies (or problems) that will be covered (or resolved) in the narrative. See Roberto Ouro, "The Garden of Eden Account: The Chiastic Structure of Genesis 2–3," *AUSS* 40/2 (2002): 223.

⁶ See Erhard Blum, "Von Gottesunmittelbarkeit zu Gottähnlichkeit: Überlegungen zur theologischen Anthropologie der Paradieserzählung," in *Göttes Nahe im Alten Testament* (ed. Gonke Eberhardt and Kathrin Liess; SBS 202; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2004), 18; See also Jean-Louis Ska, "Genesis 2–3: Some Fundamental Questions" in *Beyond Eden* (ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg; FAT 2/34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 7–8.

⁷ *Pace* those who regard Gen 2:6 as forming part of the initial setting, this verse marks the first undoing of the series of negatives in Gen 2:5 particularly v. 5c. According to Tsumura, Gen 2:5–6 as in Gen 1:2, is the setting—"the initial state of the earth, which is in close relation with the water." For Tsumura Gen 2:5–6 is the setting for the first creation activity in 2:7, "the Lord God formed." See David Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Chaoskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 77–80. See also Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 197; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (OTL; London: SCM Press, 1972), 75–76. According to Hamilton, "Verses 4–7 are one long sentence in Hebrew, containing a protasis (v. 4b), a series of circumstantial clauses (vv. 5–6), and apodosis." See Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 156. For others following this option see C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: Linguistic, Literary*

that "comes up" (יעלֶה) from the earth and in so doing the negative in 2:5c.⁸ The undoing of the negative in 2:5c also anticipates the emergence of vegetation on the micro level, in 2:9.

Solution 2 – From Inside the Garden: Gen 2:10–14 does not function as an interlude nor should it be viewed as an interruption in the narrative progression; rather, it serves as an undoing of the negative in 2:5c from the micro level.⁹ The river flowing from Eden watering the garden and branching into four rivers and watering the surrounding lands, those lands being the land of Havilah, the land of Cush, east of Asshur, and the Euphrates, is an undoing of the negative in 2:5c from inside the garden. Both from the outside and from the inside the verb **שָׁקַח** is used to describe the irrigation system. The verb **שָׁקַח** does not carry a negative connotation at either level or anywhere else in the Old Testament.¹⁰ The watering system in vv. 10–14 presupposes the existence of vegetation. From outside the garden, the whole face of the ground was watered so that vegetation could be planted and inside the garden irrigation systems were established to ensure continual watering of vegetation both inside and outside of the garden.

and *Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2006), 133; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman, 1996), 193. For further discussion on the various possible ways of reading Gen 2:5–7, see Robert V. McCabe, "A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Account (Part 2 of 2)," *DBSJ* 11 (2006): 63–133.

⁸ The אָרֶץ in Gen 2:6 watering "the whole face of the ground" (כָּל־פְּנֵי־הָאָרֶץ) does not necessarily have to be equated with the *tēhōm* (deep) in Gen 1:2 that submerged the earth. In Gen 2:6 there is a movement from the general to the particular. Gen 2:6b "the ground" (הָאָרֶץ) is watered whereas in Gen 2:6a the more general term אָרֶץ is used as the source of the אָרֶץ. See also Ellen van Wolde, *Words Become World: Semantic Studies of Genesis 1–11* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 13.

⁹ For some commentators Gen 2:10–14 is regarded as an interruption or a digression in the narrative progression. Mathews states, the description of the Garden of Eden "is a digression in the text, giving supplementary information about its verdant beauty, but its significance for the narrative's motif of resplendence shows its integral part in the narrative" (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 207). According to Miscall, Gen 2:10–14 "breaks and interrupts the second creation story and takes us outside Eden in both time and place." See Peter D. Miscall, "Jacques Derrida in the Garden of Eden," *USQR* 44 (1990): 6. For Sarna, "[t]he story of man is abruptly interrupted by a description of the geographical setting of the garden." See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 19. McKenzie notes that for the historical critical scholars Gen 2:10–14 was generally regarded to be a secondary. See John L. McKenzie, "The Literary Characteristic of Genesis 2–3," *TS* 15/4 (1954) 541–72.

¹⁰ See Gen 2:10, Ezek 17:7; 32:6; Joel 4:18; Ps 104:11; Eccl 2:6.

2 Undoing of 2:5d in 2:7, 21–25, and in 2:15 and 3:23: There Was No Humanity to Till the Ground

The absence of humanity is described as follows in Gen 2:5d: **וְאַדְם אֵין לְעָבֵד אֶת-הָאָדָם** ("and there was no humanity to work the ground"). The process of resolving this initial absence begins outside and then proceeds inside the garden and back outside. In Gen 2:5d there is wordplay on **הָאָדָם/אַדְם** marking the close relationship between humanity and the ground.¹¹

Solution 1: From Outside: The human being is created from "dust of the ground" (**מָדְהָאָדָם**) in Gen 2:7. This creation activity is immediately followed by a spatial shift as the narrative progression shifts its focus to the garden. The ground from which the human being was created, as indicated in Gen 3:23, is the ground outside the garden. Thus, the first undoing of the negative in Gen 2:5d is from outside the garden.

Solution 2: From Inside the Garden: Another human being is created from inside the garden. The human being who was created outside the garden is transported into the garden and the human role becomes limited to the Garden of Eden "to work it and to keep it" (**לְעָבֵדָה וְלִשְׁמֹרָה**) (Gen 2:15). The mandate given in 2:15, however, does not address in full the problem of creation as spelled out in 2:5d. However, before the problem of the absence of a "worker" for the ground outside can be resolved, the focus of the narrative remains in the garden, introducing a series of negatives, all relating to humanity in Gen 2:17–25, but omitting those in Gen 3. First, the human being is prohibited from eating from the tree of knowledge of good and bad: "*You shall not eat [לֹא תְאכַל]*," for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17 NRSV). Secondly, the human being's aloneness is not good: "*It is not good [לֹא-טוֹב הַיּוֹת]* for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18, NIV). Thirdly, a helper is not found for the human being among the animals: "But for the man there *was not found [לֹא-מִצְאָה]* a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:20 RSV). Fourthly, the human beings were without shame: "And the man and his wife were both naked, and *were not ashamed [וְלֹא יִתְבָּשְׂשׂוּ]*."

At the micro level, that is from within the garden in Gen 2:8–25, the negatives that are fully addressed are the intertwined two in 2:18 and 20. The first attempt to undo the negative is through the creation of the animals in 2:18, as another negative is introduced in 2:20. The undoing of the negatives in 2:18 and 20 is finally achieved through the creation of another human being, "a woman" (**אִשָּׁה**), who is created from the rib of a man (Gen 2:21–23), a suitable helper for "a man" (**שִׁירָה**). The absence of humanity is thus both addressed on macro and micro level—from outside the garden and from inside the garden, just as the lack of water is addressed both from outside and inside.

However, the presence of humanity in the garden does not fully address the negative in Gen 2:5d. For as long as human beings are enclosed in the gar-

¹¹ James McKeown, *Genesis* (The Two Horizons: Old Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 31. See also Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 202, 206.

den the initial negative persists: the ground outside the garden still lacked humanity to till it. The initial problem of creation with reference to the absence of humanity is only fully addressed in Gen 3. The limitation brought about by the Garden of Eden would require an undoing of all the negatives at the micro level in order for the original deficiency to be fully addressed with the exception of the negative in Gen 3:22. This makes it possible for humanity, not just the one human being but both the man and his wife, to be expelled from the garden, just as the river flows from Eden branching into four streams to water the surrounding lands.

The negative in 2:5d is ultimately resolved as humanity is transported back to the land outside the garden "to cultivate the ground" (לְעָבֵד אֶת־הָאָדָם), from which humanity was formed.¹² This ultimate solution comes only at the wake of humanity's undoing of the command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and bad in Gen 2:17. As elaborated by the woman in Gen 3:3, this act consequently led to the undoing of the negative in Gen 2:25 and the negative in Gen 3:4, and to the ultimate result that humanity was barred from eating from the tree of life and expelled from the garden. Thus, Gen 2:5d and 3:23 form an *inclusio* as evidenced by the repetition of the phrase לְעָבֵד אֶת־הָאָדָם in the latter text. The initial mandate "to work and care" for the garden (Gen 2:15) is superseded by the new creation mandate to לְעָבֵד אֶת־הָאָדָם, which addresses the initial lack in Gen 2:5d. However, this ultimate solution is preceded by the undoing of negatives in 2:5ab.

3 Undoing of 2:5ab in 2:9 and 3:18–19: No Shrub of the Field had yet Appeared on the Earth and No Plant of the Field Had Yet Sprung Up

The undoing of the negatives in Gen 2:5ab is prepared for by the undoing of the negatives in 2:5cd, both on macro and micro level. In the case of the negatives in Gen 2:5ab, unlike those in the *kî* clause for which solutions are worked out from the outside to the inside and back, the solutions are worked out from the inside to the outside.

Genesis 2:5ab, as Tsumura notes, "describes the unproductive and 'bare' state of the earth without any vegetation at all. The state of bare is virtually the same as *tōhû wābōhû* earth (Gen 1:2)." Important for us to note at this point is that the word pair שִׁיחָ ("shrub") and עֵשֶׂב ("plant") should be regarded as a merism signifying the totality of vegetation—inedible and edible vegetation,¹³ and/or wild and cultivated plants respectively.¹⁴

¹² Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden," 19.

¹³ Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 82.

¹⁴ Werner H. Schmidt, *Die Schöpfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), 196. For Westermann, the first word refers to wild plants that only need rain for their growth whereas the second word refers to cultivated plants which require human care (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 199).

Solution 1: From Inside the Garden: The initial watering on the macro level in 2:6 anticipates the emergence of vegetation in Gen 2:9: "And the Lord God made all kinds of trees (צְלָעִים) grow out of the ground (בָּאָדָם)—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." The pleasurable and edible vegetation, however, were apparently limited to the garden. The productive *הָאָדָם* referred to in 2:9 should rather be viewed as referring specifically to the ground "in the garden" (3:1, 2, 3). This is also enhanced by the name *Eden* which has the connotations of "well watered," "delight," and "abundance."¹⁵ From inside the garden, humanity is provided for with food from the vegetation that is referred solely as *עֵגֶל* (2:9; 16; 3:1, 2, 3, 6, 8, 11, 12, 17, 24).

Solution 2: Outside of the Garden: The negatives in Gen 2:5ab are ultimately undone in Gen 3:18: "It [the ground] will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field" (NIV). With the undoing of the negatives in the *kî* clause (Gen 2:5cd), the stage is set for the ground outside the garden to be productive. The undoing of 2:5ab comes as a result of the undoing of the negatives at the micro level in Gen 2:17, 25; 3:3, 4.¹⁶ The curse on the ground, inasmuch as it may be viewed negatively, also has a positive role in the creation process—the ground outside becomes productive as a result, thereby addressing the initial deficiency.

The terminology used in Gen 3:18, as Stordalen notes, is similar to that which we find in Gen 2:5ab: firstly, there is the use of the same verb, *צַמֵּת*, for bringing forth vegetation; secondly, the phrase "plants of the field" (עֵגֶל הַשָּׂדָה) is repeated only in this instance, thereby forming an *inclusio* with Gen 2:5b. The phrase "thorns and thistles" (קָרְזִים וְדָרְדָּר) is better viewed as a parallel to the "shrub of the field" (שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדָה) in 2:5a. In this view, Gen 3:18 not only repeats but also explains 2:5ab: the "shrubs of the field" are the thorns and thistles, whereas the "plants of the field" are edible vegetation.¹⁷ The kind of vegetation in Gen 3:18 is vegetation which did not exist prior to the transgression of humankind.¹⁸ The only kind of vegetation that existed before the transgression of humankind is the *עֵגֶל*. Thus, the thorns and thistles, and the plants of

¹⁵ See David T. Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2* (JSOTSup 83; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 94–116, 123–136; Allan R. Millard, "The Etymology of *Eden*," *VT* 34 (1984): 103–106. The LXX refers to this situation as *παράδεισον* ("paradise"), a Persian loanword used in Hellenistic times to refer to luxurious royal parks. See Jan N. Bremmer, "Paradise: From Persia, via Greece, into the Septuagint," in *Paradise Interpreted: Representations of Biblical Paradise in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Gerard P. Luttkhuizen; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 18–19).

¹⁶ The negatives in Gen 2:18 and 2:20 are completely undone when the narrative reaches v. 25. The problem of the human aloneness is resolved. The negatives in Gen 3:1, partly 3:3, 3:11, and 3:17 are not new, rather they play on the initial negative in Gen 2:17.

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Chapters 1-17*, 154.

¹⁸ Umberto Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah* (vol. 1 of *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 102.

the field both appear for the first time in 3:18; thereby rendering "the earth" (הארץ, see 2:5) productive and therefore ready for human occupation and activity.

From the macrocosmic perspective of Gen 1:1–2:4a, the creation process culminates with the beginning of humanity's work on earth and with God resting on his "holy" or "set apart" day. Humanity, in ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, is created so that the divine can rest. As Walton notes, in ancient cosmology, the "rest of the gods often involved their taking control of the cosmos. A god could rest because order had been achieved and everything was now ready to run smoothly. Deities ran the cosmos from their temples."¹⁹ God's rest takes place in his macrocosmic temple with heaven as his dwelling place.²⁰ As God rests in his heavenly resting place, humanity, as God's vicegerent, inhabits and works the earth. In Gen 1 the component of "work," as Hart argues, is evidenced by the thematic links between the "image of God" concept and the "six days of creation structure."²¹ When God's "work" of creation comes to an end, humanity's work on earth is at its beginning.

In Gen 2:4b–3:24, the expulsion of humanity from the Garden of Eden, an archetypal sanctuary,²² is a climax of the creation process as humanity is

¹⁹ John Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after Chaoskampf," *CTJ* 43 (2008): 60–61.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion on this subject, see Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Prophecy and Canon* (UND-CSJCA 3; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1977), 56–69; Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbath, Temple Building, and the Enthronement of the Lord—The Problem of the *Sitz im Leben* in Genesis 1:1–2:3," in *Mélanges biblique et orientaux en l'honneur de M. Henri Cazelles* (ed. André Caquot and Mathias Delcor; AOAT 212; Kevelaer: Butzon and Bercker; Neurirchen-Vluyn: Neurirchener Verlag, 1981), 501–512; Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 338–39; Jon D. Levenson, "The Temple and the World," *JR* 64 (1984): 275–98; Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Divine Omnipotence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 31–45; Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 194; Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2004).

²¹ Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *TynBul* 46/2 (1995): 324.

²² The Garden of Eden in biblical literature is viewed as an archetypal sanctuary. See Gordon J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," in *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 1986), 19–25. Wenham writes, "The Garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem. The parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of a sanctuary" (Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism," 19). For parallels between the

received by the ground outside for its benefit. However, Eden is unlike the later sanctuaries which were built by human hands, as this sanctuary was not built by human hands. Humanity initially had to function as a royal-priest to "work" and "guard" in the garden-temple. The garden-temple functioned as a spatial location from within which the creation process matured in the service of the rest of creation.

C THE FINAL NEGATIVE IN GENESIS 3:22 NOT UNDONE

Following the basic plot of Gen 2:4b–3:24, the creation process culminates with a negative, which, unlike all the previous negatives, is not undone:

And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. *He must not be allowed to reach out his hand* [זֶה יִשְׁלַח פָּנָיו] *and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever*" (Gen 3:22 NIV).

Humanity's newly attained status of being like God comes at a loss for humanity, but with a gain for creation. The barring of humanity from eating from the tree of life forms part of the undoing of the negative introduced by the serpent in Gen 3:4: "You will not surely die" (אַמְתָּה תַּחַת), in contrast to God's stated consequence in Gen 2:17, "you will surely die" (מוֹת תַּחַת). This statement is affirmed with "for you are dust and to dust you will return" in Gen 3:19. In order to ensure that "a return to dust" (death) is inescapable, humanity is not simply barred from eating from the tree of life, which in Gen 3:22 is qualified as the tree of "eternal life," but is also expelled from the garden and the way to the tree of life is secured (Gen 3:23–24). From inside the garden there is hope of immortality, thereby rendering the Garden of Eden a locus that is immune to death. It is only from within the garden that immortality can be attained. The final negative in Gen 3:22 becomes the problem of humanity as it implies a loss of a chance to attain immortality. Gen 2:4b–3:24, like other ancient Near Eastern mythologies, such as Gilgamesh and Adapa, presents humanity's "*loss for a chance* to immortality, and not the loss of an original immortality."²³ Thus, God, by expelling humanity from the Garden and away

Garden and Israel's tabernacle and temple see, Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 66–80; Terje Stordalen, *Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2–3 and Symbolism of the Eden Garden in Biblical Hebrew Literature* (CBET 25; Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 457–59; John Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 78–85; Carol L. Meyers, *The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of a Symbol from Biblical Cult* (ASORDS 2; Missoula: Scholars, 1976), 162–72.

²³ Konrad Schmid, "Loss of Immortality? Hermeneutical Aspects of Genesis 2–3 and Its Early Receptions," in *Beyond Eden* (ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Riedweg; FAT 34; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 64. See also Avrid S. Kapelrud, "You Shall Surely Not Die," in *History and Traditions of Early Israel: Studies Presented to*

from the tree of life, made death inescapable for humanity. However, a loss for humanity was a gain for creation, as human beings are returned to the ground outside to work it; thereby solving the initial deficiency of creation (see Gen 2:5d and 3:23).

From outside the garden, the return to the garden and the eating from the tree of life becomes the goal for humanity. The hope for humanity lies in the undoing of the final negative in Gen 3:22. The inability of humanity to eat from the tree of life consequently becomes the problem of God's "very good" creation, which the rest of the biblical canonical story intends to solve. From the NT's perspective, the negative in Gen 3:23 is solved initially through the sacrificial death of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, which opens up the gates of paradise (Luke 23:43), and will ultimately be resolved in the eschatological new heaven and new earth, a gardenlike-city-temple, wherein humanity will be allowed to eat from the tree of life (Rev 2:7; 22:1–21; cf. IV Ezra 8:52–54). As Barr notes, the hope for immortality "was on the biblical agenda from the very beginning, with Adam and Eve."²⁴ Furthermore, the hope for immortality is intertwined with the Sabbath in Gen 2:1–3, which as von Rad argues was a preparation of what will benefit humanity in this life, and be necessary for humanity, "yes, that which one day will receive him eschatologically in eternity."²⁵ For the author of Hebrews the protologic Sabbath that God entered at creation is a present reality and an eschatological reality (Heb 4). Thus, in the Sabbath motif and in the Garden of Eden motif is the presence of eschatology imbedded in protology.²⁶ Humanity's longing to regain the Garden of Eden is thus a longing to enter God's Sabbath.

It may be concluded that following the basic plot of the story, the creation process begins from outside, continues from inside the garden, and climaxes outside. The creation process cannot be considered complete with humanity enclosed in the garden as its tiller and keeper. The creation process comes to rest with humanity returned to the earth in order to serve it. Gen 3 in this scheme forms part and parcel of the creation process. However, the creation process comes to rest with a negative in v. 22, which is yet to be undone.

Eduard Nielsen (ed. André Lemaire and Benedikt Otzen; VTSup 50; Leiden: Brill, 1993), 61.

²⁴ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 116.

²⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 62. The Sabbath is presented in the first creation narrative as a day without end. This is evidence by the lack of the refrain "And there was evening, and there was morning, the seventh day"; instead, the seventh day is declared at the beginning thereby signifying a new era in the creation process: "in the beginning (בָּרָאשִׁית) God created" (Gen 1:1) and "on the seventh day [השְׁבִיעִי]" God finished and ceased/rested.

²⁶ See John V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 183–203.

The Garden of Eden functions as an intermediary state which necessitated the creation process to reach its full cycle. If indeed the story of creation is concluded in Gen 2:25 then, to use Stordalen's words,

The qualitative deficiency of 2:5 is 'over-solved' in the garden, which enjoys both water and a working gardener. The spatial task, however, is "under-solved" as long as the solution occurs only in the garden and not in the "land."²⁷

The Garden of Eden, as Naidoff suggests, functioned as a womb to express the growing fullness of creation.²⁸ The garden was an intermediary state to allow for creation to reach its full cycle. The initial lack of humanity to "work" the ground is resolved by the transportation of humanity back to the ground out of which it was taken.

The first creation narrative and the second creation narrative both end in separation. From the macrocosmic perspective of Gen 1:1-2:4a, the creation culminates with God resting on his "holy" or "set apart" (שְׁמַרְנָה) day. Thus, from the first creation narrative's perspective, creation comes to an end with God having separated himself from humanity—God's dwelling is in heaven, his throne room, whereas, humanity is an inhabitant of the earth as a representative of God. From the second creation narrative perspective, the creation process ends with humanity separated from God by its expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the archetypal sanctuary. The garden-temple functioned as a locus from within which the creation process matures in the service of the rest of creation. The expulsion of humanity is thus the climax of the creation process as humanity is received by the ground outside for its benefit.

It should be noted that humanity outside the garden lives in God's over all "very good" creation. The movement from inside to outside, in the second creation narrative, is not a movement from a place of blessing to a place devoid of blessing. The ground outside the garden is continually watered and productive, yet it is dependent on humanity for its development, and conversely humanity is dependent on the ground and its vegetation for its existence and survival.²⁹ The lands outside the garden are also rich with minerals—the gold in the land of Havilah is referred to as "good" (בָּטָן), and there are also other minerals such as bdellium and onxy stone (see Gen 2:12, RSV).

Pace Carr, the Gen 2:4b–3:24 creation narrative does not function as a corrective of the Gen 1:1–2:4a creation narrative; rather it taps into the absence of the evaluative formula with regard to humanity, and therefore functions as a

²⁷ Stordalen, "Man, Soil, Garden," 17.

²⁸ Bruce D. Naidoff, "A Man to Work the Soil: A New Interpretation of Genesis 2–3," *JSOT* 5 (1978): 4.

²⁹ For this paragraph I am indebted to Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 54.

resumptive renarration of the land creatures cycle and humanity cycle in Gen 1:24–30.³⁰ Humanity's liberty to eat from all trees and all plants is qualified in the second creation narrative—the tree of life, which would potentially give humanity eternal life if consumed, but is off limits. Freedom comes with limits, yet freedom with limits is a problem.

D CONCLUDING REMARKS

The absence of the evaluation formula with regard to the creation of humanity in Gen 1:26–30 generates suspense and anticipation in the text. The suspense and anticipation in Gen 1:26–30 is resolved in the second creation narrative, Gen 2:4b–3:24, which functions for the most part as a resumption of the sixth day of creation in the first creation narrative, Gen 1:1–2:4a. This is particularly so when Gen 2:4b–3:24 as a whole is viewed as a creation narrative and not just Gen 2:4b–25. Gen 3, the so-called "fall" narrative or "crime and punishment" narrative is a continuation of the creation process. The second creation narrative functions as a commentary on why humanity is not singled out as "good." Humanity is at the end of the sixth day "fallen," to use the common language; however, the so-called "fall" of humanity forms part of the creation process. The fall of humanity and its consequences are not subsequent to the creation process; rather they form part of the very fabric of the creation process.

The fall of humanity, in as much as it may be viewed negatively, freed humanity from the confines of the garden for the benefit of creation, yet at a loss for humanity. The sojourn of humanity outside the garden is a loss of humanity's chance to attain immortality and therefore it is not good. For the author of Gen 1–3, the very fact that humanity dies explains the absence of the evaluation formula with regard to humanity in Gen 1:26–30.

The absence of an evaluative formula with regard to the creation of humanity should also caution against the tendency to regard the final climactic evaluation as carrying the connotation of "perfection." To read the first creation narrative as if it concludes with humanity in paradise misses the anticipatory character of the first creation narrative. The brevity of the first creation narrative in explaining the creation process of human kind is elaborated on by the

³⁰ David M. Carr, *Reading the Fractures of Genesis: Historical and Literary Approaches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). 68. Blenkinsopp also indicates that considering the differences between Gen 1:1–2:4a and Gen 2:4b–3:24, the second creation story may be read as "offsetting the optimism and undisturbed serenity of the first by introducing an element of ambiguity and psychological realism, and especially by speaking more directly about how things went wrong right from the beginning of human life in society." See Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 54–55.

commentary in Gen 2:4b–3:24. The first creation narrative is not about an originally sinless creation in which humanity was in the Garden of Eden at the end of the sixth day of creation. The absence of the evaluative formula with regard to humanity points to the fact that human life is not unlimited.

For the author of Gen 1–3, creation is “very good” at the end of the sixth day of creation, not because it is utopian, but rather because it is functional. Creation that was initially unproductive and uninhabited is at the end of the sixth day of creation productive and inhabited. Humanity does not aimlessly inhabit the ground/land: in the royal language of Gen 1, humanity inhabits the earth/land in order to rule and subdue the earth, and in the servitude language of Gen 2–3, humanity inhabits the land in order to work the ground. However, in as much as humanity has the authority over creation, humanity’s problem is death.

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Dr Hulisani Ramantswana, University of South Africa, Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, P O Box 392, UNISA, 0003. *Email*: ramanh@unisa.ac.za.