

Review of: Bernd Janowski. *Biblischer Schöpfungsglaube*

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Janowski, Bernd, Biblischer Schöpfungsglaube: Religionsgeschichte – Theologie – Ethik: mit drei Anhängen und zahlreichen Abbildungen. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023. Pp. XVIII, 775. ISBN 978-3-16-159326-0 (Leinen); ISBN 978-3-16-162319-6 (Broschur); ISBN 978-3-16-162245-8 (eBook).

Biblical creation texts bear witness to ideas about the origin of the world, the place of humans in it, and the role of animals and plants that continue to shape the world of today. Bernd Janowski's comprehensive volume about biblical concepts of creation considers both the cosmological traditions of antiquity and the animal and environmental ethics of the present day. The ancient authors and readers, Janowski notes in his preface, surely read Gen 8:22 as a promise: "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." Today, however, we read this text differently, namely with fear and trembling, as if the "as long as" could have the meaning of a time limit (VII). Janowski is aware of the great threat that human economic activity poses to the ecological balance. During the four decades he has been studying the biblical texts of creation, he says, the situation has deteriorated dramatically. The texts of the Bible powerfully present the beauty and fragility of the only world we have. Therefore, today a scholarly approach to these texts cannot do otherwise: it must vehemently draw attention to the fact that mankind is responsible for the preservation of this planet and its features. Talking about creation and believing in the Creator is an ethical challenge to change one's own lifestyle and the global economic activity.

Janowski's masterful overview of the role of creation in the Hebrew Bible starts with basic hermeneutical questions about the belief in "creation" (part I). He convincingly shows that the approaches of creationism and intelligent design thoroughly misunderstand the biblical texts about creation. The theory of evolution and modern natural science, on the other hand, can be easily reconciled with the interpretation of the Bible. In part II, Janowski continues with an analysis of the biblical Primeval History (Gen 1–9) and the presentation of various perspectives on the world as creation: the natural cosmos (the order of nature, the human being as creation, the animals as God's creation, including reflections on animal ethics).

Part III discusses various topics of the concept “creation,” such as the relationship between creation and the real socio-historical world as it is experienced by humans. Another topic is the biblical idea of the human being as God’s creation, blooming and breaking, and a third one presents the animal world. Here Janowski discusses important aspects of a biblical animal ethics: the manifold protective provisions for animals, the commandment of rest from work also for animals, the prudence of animals. An excursus deals with the groaning of creation and all creatures in Rom 8:18–30. Humans and animals form a community of destiny, they share the same origin from God as creator and the same physical life as well as the goal of a final redemption, as Paul outlines it in Romans. Further thematic aspects concern the role of man in the whole of creation (creation and kingdom, creation and history) and the religious system of symbols (creation and temple, creation and chaos, creation and wisdom).

Janowski summarizes his results in a systematic and theological essay (part IV) including reflections on ethics of human respect and appreciation for all God’s creatures. While the priestly Primeval History attributes the preservation of creation to God (see Gen 8:22), today the perspective changes in view of man-made climate change. The question arises how faith in the preservation of the world by God the Creator can be reconciled with our ecological, social, political efforts and with our urgent ethical tasks for the preservation of creation. The current major ecological and political crises make it necessary to reformulate the traditional theology of creation. The promise of the biblical text in a literal sense is complemented in a deeper sense by the ethical imperative to preserve the environment. According to Janowski, a contemporary reading of the Bible calls for a new awareness of one’s creatureliness and for the preservation of creation in its entirety. Man is not the crown of creation, but a part of it. This leads to the insight that other living beings also have the right to life and that mankind must take this into account in their actions. Janowski demands that we must find an attitude that understands the world in this sense as God’s creation and not simply a space for the utilization and consumption according to selfish, self-determined purposes. In our relationship with other living beings, we must be guided by an ethic that brings to the fore the idea of the community of the living. It is necessary to learn anew, with Ps 104 and other biblical texts, to marvel at the wonder of creation and thus to respect life as a gift of God. This sensitivity leads to a new self-understanding of human beings and their role in the world.

The appendices present the central texts of the Hebrew Bible on creation (485–505) and extra-biblical sources (texts and line-drawings / photographs) about cosmology and creation in Antiquity from Mesopotamia and Ancient Egypt to the Qur’an (507–651). A third appendix collects source texts about animal ethics and creation ethics from Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), René Descartes (1596–1650), and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) via Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) and Karl Barth (1886–1968) to poets and thinkers of the 20th century like Nelly Sachs (1891–1970), Hans Jonas (1903–1993), and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) and of the 21st century like Edward O. Wilson (1929–2021), Markus Schroer (*1964), and Corine Pelluchon (*1967). Janowski concludes his monumental work with Saint Francis’s Cantic of the Sun.

With this book, Janowski offers a fundamental, encyclopedic reappraisal of the belief in creation and the Creator expressed literarily in the Bible. He analyzes all relevant texts with exegetical thoroughness and embeds them in a larger cultural context. It is particularly helpful

that he fully quotes the most important biblical texts, which he himself translated. A major advantage of the book is that the source texts from the ancient Near Eastern and ancient Egyptian environments are available in the appendix. The excerpts of original texts from the history of philosophy and theology make it possible to trace the development of the concept of creation and Creator through the centuries. However, Janowski is particularly to be commended for having succeeded in transforming the theological content of the creation speech into the contemporary situation: His ethical appeal, drawn from the texts, that humans finally live up to their responsibility toward creation is a powerful message. In particular, Janowski provides important foundations for the development of a long overdue animal ethics. Creation is not a self-service store for mankind's selfish purposes. Creation is a habitat designed by God for all living creatures, which, like humans, have the right to life: "Life that wants to live, in the midst of life that wants to live" (Albert Schweitzer, see p. 247).