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Mitteilungen
From Chaos to Cosmos:
Sacred Space in Genesis

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With the appearance of Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* came the inauguration of theologians and philosophers questioning the preeminence of scholarly attention given to »time« to the virtual exclusion of »space.«¹ Eliade unlike many scholars up to his day placed the concept of space on an equal footing with time; »time« was the ubiquitous category that seemed to arrest the energies of scholars as they sought to explore issues of history, memory, and eternity. Accordingly, time as a major hermeneutical supposition assumed the priority of a »diachronic« reading of the text; the principal interpretive task has been twofold: recovering the original situation of the text and determining a history of the evolution and transmission of the text.² Larry Shiner, in his discussion of spatiality, begins with the following critique of time's exclusiveness:

In almost every period Western intellectual life has been preoccupied with the problem of time and history. In the past fifty years this preoccupation has become an obsession, especially in literature and theology. Like most obsessions it has tended to numb our perception for other realms of experience.³

I, along with other authors (Eliade, Kliever, etc.), do not contend that »time« has been exhausted or that it is no longer pertinent to religious and philosophical studies, nor

¹ *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959), 20–67. Note a few of the academic efforts since Eliade's book punctuated the concept of »space.« Lonnie Kliever, »Story and Space: The Forgotten Dimension«, *JAAR* 45 (1977), 529–63; Larry E. Shiner, »Sacred Space, Profane Space, Human Space«, *JAAR* 60:4 (Dec. 1972), 425–36; Robert Detweiler, »Sacred Texts/Sacred Space« In *Breaking the Fall: Religious Readings of Contemporary Fiction* (1989), 122–58; L. Shannon Jung »Spatiality, Relativism, and Authority«, *JAAR* 50:2 215–35; Jonathan Z. Smith »The Influence of Symbols Upon Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand«, *Worship* 44 (1970), 457–74. Also note some of the more important treatments on this topic of space, Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1964); Robert Ardrey, *The Territorial Imperative* (1966); Eugene Minkowski, *Lived Time: Phenomenological and Psychopathological Studies* (1970); and Gerhardus Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (1963).

² John J. Collins, »The Meaning of Sacrifice«, *BR* 22 (1976), 19–34. Collins offers an excellent critique of the subjectivity of the »diachronic« method of interpreting and offers as an alternative a »synchronic« method based on the presuppositions of structural anthropology in the tradition of Levi-Strauss.

³ »Sacred Space«, 425. Kliever's assessment is also pertinent, »Time became the exclusive home of subjectivity while space became the domain of objectivity«, 533.

do I contend that time preempts the concept of space. However, we do well to heed those who now suggest the importance of sacred space and to further parlay that wealth of knowledge in aiding the interpreter's understanding of biblical texts and the ideologies they proffer. It is my postulate that sacred space is a predominant but neglected archetype underlying much of Scripture's representation of God's interactions with humankind. It is thus this fact that is yet to be explored to its fullest potential, and it is this fact to which we turn our attention as it relates to understanding biblical narratives.

My encounter with sacred space has been very dissimilar from these scholarly discussions of the importance of space as a »forgotten dimension« and the consequent contrastings and comparisons with time. I first encountered the idea of sacred space, or I should rather say sacred space encountered me, in a study of ancient Israelite worship, i.e. its relevance to centralization, sacrifice, etc. Though I understood the concept superficially and vaguely, sacred space from that moment aroused my interest and captured my imagination. Something about sacred space seemed to me to be supremely meaningful and hence irresistibly compelling.

This study will commence with a brief investigation of the idea of sacred space as understood by Mircea Eliade and subsequent thoughts of other scholars such as Kliever and Shiner. This section of the article will also incorporate cursory »nods« to additional theories of sacred space. Next we will examine the major categories of sacred space as they relate to the Gen 1–3 narrative and its representation of the Hebrew cosmogony. In this section of the article we are in closer proximity to Eliade's dichotomous understandings of space within the contexts of sacred/profane and ancient/modern history.⁴ It will be necessary to address the implications of sacred space to Gen 1–3, for I believe that these implications are seminal for an understanding of that narrative and its ideology.

At first, the preceding categories appear to be disconnected and arbitrary.⁵ As I will attempt to establish, sacred space is an essential philosophical category and crucial to the domain of theological, biblical, and existential investigations. If I am correct in my conclusions, sacred space is a major theological and existential motif introduced in Genesis as foundational to God's character and work. It is a category which illumines our primal questions of existence. Sacred space continues to interweave itself throughout the writings of ancient Israel representing humankind's fierce struggle with the presence and absence of God, the reality of sin and its redemption, and the absoluteness and relativity of relationality. Dismembered, disassociated, homeless humankind pleads wholeness and order in the face of chaos and disorder; s/he seeks to return to the sacred garden. Humanity, struggling with a sense of disintegration and alienation, passionately seeks the oneness of

⁴ Eliade has been criticized by scholars as positing a false dichotomy between rigid categories of sacred and profane, and the radical differences in ancient and modern conceptions of sacrilization. »My quarrel is less with the qualities which Eliade, van der Leeuw, Isaac and others usually attribute to sacred space than with the polarization of the data which results when the concept is applied.« Shiner, 425–26.

⁵ Though, scholars have begun to note the value of applying categories somewhat analogous to sacred space in the Genesis cosmogony to other narratives and ideologies such as sacrifice. Douglas Davies, »An Interpretation of Sacrifice in Leviticus«, ZAW 89 (1977), 387–99; Peter J. Kearney, »Creation and Liturgy: The P Redaction of Ex. 25–40«, ZAW (1977), 377–87; and George Aichele, Jr. »Form and World« In *The Limits of Story* (1985), 25–51.

sacred space. Thus sacred space as irrupting initially in Genesis demonstrated itself repeatedly and relevantly in the worship of Israel as humankind sought to exist authentically in the presence of the sacred, the cosmos, the absolute, the divine.

The Concept of Sacred Space

Clearly, the task of offering a definitive understanding of sacred space is impossible in such a short paper. It is therefore not necessary to give a comprehensive definition or one that offers any significant advance in the theoretical comprehension, but one that will offer one strand of a complex tapestry. Eliade begins his discussion of the sacred in tandem with an understanding of the »holy« presented by Rudolf Otto's work *Das Heilige*.⁶ Eliade concurs with Otto in viewing the sacred not as an abstract philosophical principle but as a personal »power« evinced by Deity. This »terrible power« exposes creation to the awesome »mystery and majesty« of the sacred.⁷ According to Eliade citing Otto, it is thus the presence of the »wholly other« which confronts the creature with the sacred and the resultant transcendence from the creature's world to the sacred world. Using these general categories, sacred space is comprised of three fundamental elements: it is space that is set apart from other spaces, it is space that is closely connected to Deity, and it is space that evokes response from humankind. In summary then, sacred space is divinely disconnected space that provokes worship in humankind and provides relational connection in a world replete with profane, chaotic space.

In his chapter on »Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred,« Eliade further elucidates the phenomenon of sacred space centering around a few key concepts that I have chosen to synthesize for the purposes of the paper. According to Eliade, these elements of sacred space are universal components in all occurrences of sacred space as opposed to profane space, a sacralized world to a desacralized world. Sacred space appears to include disruption, orientation, and communication as intrinsic to its essence. Keep in mind that I have chosen these categories not only because they are part of Eliade's trenchant analysis of sacred space, but because they are archetypal units to help us understand the Genesis cosmogony and in turn the relevance to Israelite worship. These ideas can be seen within a connected relationship which proceeds developmentally from disruption or difference to orientation or centralization to communication or passage. The relationship though cannot be rigidly held for all three aspects interact conjointly with one another.

1. Disruption, Difference

Ironically, sacred space which is space that brings unity, order, and wholeness to religious humankind begins with disruption and separation. Sacred space »breaks upon« a world that is in Eliade's term homogeneous. It is not space that is universally the same wherever humankind may exist. The very existence of some variety of creation or universe with no perceptible dissimilarities would be a creation or universe devoid of sacred space – creation would be nothing more than profane space which is always indicative of chaos and relativity. Sacred space intrudes into a vague, formless world that did not until then exhibit any distinction or variation. The supreme irony of sacred space is that its diversity does not degenerate into chaos, but lifts chaos into order – disruption leads to wholeness.

⁶ Eliade, op. cit., 8–10.

⁷ Ibid., 9.

This tension between sameness and difference underlies and undergirds the concept of sacred space. Sacred space, according to Eliade and others, is space that is separated from the sameness of the creative order by differentiating a place that is symbolically or ritually different from any place like it. Throughout history elements of sameness have terrified humankind for its apparent opposition to sacred space, profane space portrays a sameness that symbolizes a primeval wasteland exuding darkness, chaos, and ultimately that which threatens humankind most – the loss of the self, the threat of non-being. Thus sameness without contradiction or disparity historically has been the loss of national, social, and individual boundaries. The profanation of space is the transmutation of order and boundaries to chaos and the violation of individuality.

It follows that sacred space represents the actual and symbolic banishment of chaos and disorder by a divine encounter and irruption into primeval and existential chaos. This disconnected, divided space introduces wholeness and order in the place of former chaos. Gaston Bachelard makes the following observation about »eulogized space«:

Indeed, the images I want to examine are the quite simple images of *felicitous space*. In this orientation, these investigations deserve to be called topophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space. Attached to its protective value, which can be a positive one, are also imagined values, which soon become dominant. Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor.⁸

Though Bachelard's book does not include the study of sacred space directly, he delimits in this passage the function of what he calls »eulogized space« as that space which by nature is not indifferent or defenseless. Endemic to sacred space is radical disruption and difference. It is through disruption into the chaos of sameness and non-being that sacred space comes into being.

2. Orientation, Centralization

The irruption of sacred space into the nothingness occasioned by the deity is neither arbitrary nor is it purposeless. The introduction of sacred space into a predominantly profane world reflects the possibility for orientation. Without a divinely appointed reference point in the profane world of relativity and sameness, humankind is left with no possibility of orienting himself or herself around that which is »wholly other« and that which has the potential of transcending himself or herself in the mundane world of existence. We observe two important motifs in the preceding statement – sacred space affords the creature an orientation from which to embark and the movement away from himself or herself to a transcendent reality.

For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation. When the sacred manifests itself in any hierophany, there is not only a break in the homogeneity of space; there is also revelation of an absolute reality ...⁹

⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1964), xxxi–xxxii.

⁹ Eliade, *op. cit.*, 21.

The intention of sacred space is one that humankind posits to center himself or herself in an ambiguous world comprised of no demarcation.

Eliade remarks that it is humankind's assumption of sacred space that attempts to find an absolute point in an otherwise relative world, and this too is the same assumption whereby humankind seeks to live in the »real« world or the world that manifests an objective reality. Sacred space provides the center point which is the »real« point in the midst of the »relative« which constantly threatens to exterminate humanity by expunging any objective, external reference point. Humankind in this unsafe world is continuously in danger of becoming awash in a sea of chaotic relativity which would once again be the loss of the self because there exists no contradistinction between selves. Ironically, it is the absolute reference point provided by sacred space that allows the subjectivity of the person to thrive.

Eliade makes one other pertinent point relating to the orientation of sacred space. Humankind has sought throughout the generations to centralize sacred space as the center for worship of the gods and the locus of society. This centralizing tendency though is not a geometric centralization but more of an existential exercise. Ancient peoples thought of centralization in the category of what the concept meant for their particular existence. Therefore societies and nationalities could have a multitude of centralized places within the native land, for it was more the truth centralization referred to rather than the mere geometric dimension.

3. Communication, Passage

The final major category in understanding the scope of sacred space leads us to comprehend further the purpose of differentiation but also the *goal* of orientation. As we noted earlier in the paper, these three concepts can be observed in a developmental order leading to the ultimate end which is sacred space. No doubt, sacred space exists for the primary purpose of placing humankind in communion with the world of the sacred. It is here that humankind feels the greatest alienation and it is here that sacred space offers the potential avenue to bridge the two separate worlds.

Differentiation and orientation provided humankind with the symbolic means to distinguish in the midst of sameness, orient himself or herself in the midst of potential wastelands, and thereby communicate ritually with the sacred world in which the gods resided. Sacred space was the symbolic integration of humankind's divided self, cohesion of disintegrated relationships, and most importantly, the restoration with the transcendent world of the divine.

Historically, humankind has been confronted with the problem of national and individual sin and the disconnectedness that such sin eventuates within the person and the community. This dissonance not only renders humankind no longer in communion with the world of the sacred but there exists further a personal dissonance within man or woman's interior existence. Humankind existing in a world surrounded by profane space is alienated from all elements from without and within himself or herself. Sacred space thus is that solution to the disassociating and dismembering tendencies of profane space; the sacred introduces literally and symbolically the wholeness that communication to the sacred world can impart. Sacred space tenders dissymmetry to differentiate in a world of sameness and thus to orient oneself around that centering space and effectively redeem communication in a profane world.

Sacred space effects relationship with once alienated existences, it evokes speech and understanding where there once resided only a deafening silence and confusion. It is thus

relationality which lies as most integral to sacred space. Difference, orientation, and communication are essential categories in sacred space to actuate relationship.

Shannon Jung emphasizes the importance of sacred space as integral to the concept of relationality.¹⁰ »Spatiality ... is far from being extrinsic to being and value. Since spatiality is present in any bodily activity, it is an inevitable component of human interaction and relation.«¹¹ According to Jung, embodiment as a necessary quality of spatiality views no dichotomy between the »object-subject, mind-body« splits. Embodiment then expresses both aspects of the ambivalence of sacred space in that it recognizes an essential unity which is not relative; and yet, it at the same time emphasizes the »relativity« of the human process which does not accentuate its arbitrariness but its very humanity. »Embodiment suggests that perspective is radically rather than superficially human ...«¹²

Embodiment as spatiality in addition provides the human context for »sociality.« It is through embodiment that humankind recognizes his or her wholly otherness, and it is through the medium of otherness that relationality is possible. Without this interplay of sameness and difference inherent to sacred space, relationship and the wholeness it communicates would be entirely impossible. As mentioned formerly, sacred space assumes a distinct »wholly otherness« that »can indeed provide the occasion of transcendence.«¹³ This sociality also leads to Jung's third concept of spaciality which is symbolization. Symbolization is a result of the dynamics between embodiment and socialization and it aids in the person's discovery of meaning that is not monolithic. Symbols »depend upon and promote communication,« but this communication is one that involves the relational aspect of knowing and being known. It is knowing through symbols which guides the knower beyond the explicit meaning and thereby moves the knower to a reality wholly other than himself of herself. Even this symbolization is a transcendent exercise leading to wholeness within existence. Relational communication though demands difference and orientation existing within the full force of the ambivalence it introduces. To remove the ambivalence is to remove sacred space which in turn is the profanation of relationship.

Sacred Space in Genesis

The interpretations of Gen 1–3 alone could most likely fill thousands of volumes. Our purpose here is not to expound these chapters but to view them under the categories already established in sacred space. This methodology does not negate the value of the historicity of this text or the historicity that it presents, but assumes these categories as reflective of a structural or archetypal model. This synchronic method presupposes the categories as universal archetypes to be true from the synthesis of philosophical, theological, and anthropological understandings. We will then approach the text in Genesis with these assumptions of preunderstanding.¹⁴

Oceans of ink have been spilled on Gen 1,1–2, and as long as humankind exists on this earth and remains concerned about »the beginnings« these verses will never be fully plumbed. What is significant for our purpose is God's speaking into and against the chaos

¹⁰ Jung, op. cit., 220.

¹¹ Ibid., 216.

¹² Ibid., 220.

¹³ Ibid., 225.

¹⁴ Note again Collins, op. cit.

– the formlessness, the meaninglessness, the darkness, the omnipresent profane space.¹⁵ Creation does not begin with the god on his »princely throne« as in the Akkadian creation epic or the dismembering violence of the Babylonian creation account, *Enuma Elish*.¹⁶ Creation in spoken word encounters the violent, formless wasteland to disrupt chaos and wrest meaning (form) and order from the chaos.¹⁷ This speaking into the chaos demanded the fierce intrusion of word into silence, meaning into obtuseness, light into darkness. There is dismembering and dissymmetry in this representation of creation, but it is a disruption for the sake of unity and wholeness – it is a disruption with a profound teleology. It is a disruption that affords orientation around the garden of Eden (2,7–9) and around the person of God (1,26–28). This teleology is expressed as a movement from the divine ultimately toward humankind in Gen 1,26–28 so humankind could orient himself or herself to God. Sacred space was for the purpose of stabilizing existence to allow for relationship.

It is significant that the inherent problem of creation in the Genesis cosmogony is one of profane space. In other ancient creation accounts the obstacles are societal and interpersonal – persons rage against one another. In Genesis, the divine person embodied in word contends against space that is »formless and void.«

The disruption and division of Gen 1,1–2 continues in the rest of the creation story. In Gen 1,3–5, God speaks light into existence which assumes the existence of darkness. This creative activity is further explained as an act of separation or division. In vv. 6–8, God speaks the »dome« into existence separating the waters from the waters. Once again in vv. 9–10 the waters are gathered together and divided by the new dry land brought into existence. Vv. 14–17 portray God as creating the »greater and the lesser« lights to separate the day from the night. In vv. 20–21 the creatures created on the fifth day are classified separately according to their respective environments, the swarming creatures in the sea and the flying creatures in the sky. The creatures in vv. 24–25 are to bring forth according to their kind, and they are divided into wild animals, domestic animals, and crawling creatures. The final division in this pericope, signifying the pinnacle, details the creation of humankind in God's image. That image is once again a separate one. Humankind is made in the image of God and that image is both male *and* female (vv. 26–28).

Difference and division are also evident in the two stories of creation in Gen 1–2.¹⁸ God in 1,1–2,4 is distantly involved in the creative activity by speaking realities into

¹⁵ In my mind, this »speaking« of God in Gen 1,3.5.6.8.9.10.11.14.20.22.24.26.28.29 is the most radical element of the cosmogony especially in light of the other ancient representations of creation. In most accounts the god or gods war, destroy, dismember, rage, and masturbate the world into existence. Their frenetic creation is in stark contrast with that portrayed in Genesis.

¹⁶ James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*. 2 vols. (1975), vol. 1, 1–5 and vol. 2, 31–40.

¹⁷ Exilic terminology included concepts that were a direct reversion of all that the Genesis cosmogony presented. The exile was Israel's most feared punishment because as a loss of difference, orientation, and communication it would be a return to chaos and non-being. Jer 4,23 is a well known passage of the results of disobedience and the return to the chaos of Gen 1. »I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void; and to the heavens, and they had no light.« Jeremiah uses the same phrase as Gen 1 in describing chaos (*tohu wabohu*). See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* (1977).

¹⁸ Aichele, op. cit., 36–46, has an excellent discussion of »space in the garden.«

existence. In the second creation narrative (2,4b–25), God is intimately involved in creating humankind: he fashioned man out of the earth (7), he breathed life into man (7), and he planted a garden in Eden (8).¹⁹ The creator is viewed intentionally through the contexts of sameness and difference within the cosmogony of Gen 1–3.

The cosmogony in Ch. 1 commences with the disruption of profane space to interject *ex nihilo* a world that by its very nature is opposed to all that is profane space. The disruption and division now within *sacred space* proceed in ascending order to the final culmination of sacred space which is the female and the male made in the image of God. In other divisions occurring in Ch. 2 the Lord God plants a garden in the east separate from the rest of the earth (2,8). Two trees are divided from the rest of the trees as sacred space (vs. 9). The two trees are sacred space in their separation and orientation,²⁰ but the »tree of life« offers the eternity of sacred space and the »tree of good and evil« as sacred space offers the reversal of sacred space – the potential for profane space. Further divisions occur in vv. 10–14 in one of the most enigmatic and interesting pericopes. One river flows out of the garden of Eden but thereafter divides into four rivers.²¹ This flowing of the river outward from the garden emphasizes the centrality of the garden as opposed to the rest of the world.

The twin motifs of sameness and difference inundate the Gen 1–3 pericope. A prototypical paradigm of this fact can be observed in man's statement of relational unity (2,23) and the narrator's statement that the man leaves the mother and father (2,24) to cling to his wife so that they »become one flesh.« So which is true? Are male and female the same, are God and humankind the same?²² Or are male and female, God and humankind different? Of course the answer to both is yes, but it is this dichotomy of difference and sameness that has been the perennial dilemma of humankind. As I mentioned previously, the concept of difference allows the possibility of sameness and therefore relationality. It is sacred space that offers difference within orientation and therefore the potential for connectedness. Otherness expresses the possibility of transcendence and sameness the common ground to connect that transcendence within community.

Apparently, outside and opposite of the primeval chaos of Gen 1,1–2, the entire earth was sacred space with a comfortable, profitable tension between sameness and differ-

¹⁹ This difference of course has been the source of contention for critics for generation. According to them difference indicates disunity rather complementary prisms through which to view multitudinous dimensions of the Creator. U. Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1 (1961), 110–11.

²⁰ »This means that the garden has two centers: its unity is disrupted. Biblical scholarship is troubled by this duality and explains it historically as the result of the incomplete combination of two stories into the canonical version. The present approach neither confirms nor disputes this; however, instead of explaining away the duality as an historical awkwardness, it takes it as an essential element of the canonical story«, Aichele, 39–40.

²¹ See Peter Miscall's excellent treatment of this pericope in »Derrida in the Garden of Eden?«, *USQR* 46 (1990), 1 ff.

²² »The statement in verse 27 (Ch. 1) is not an easy one. But it is worth noting that humankind is spoken of as *singular* (»he created him«) and *plural* (»he created them«). This peculiar formula makes an important affirmation. On the one hand, humankind is a single entity. But on the other hand, humankind is community, male and female«, Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (1982), 33–34.

ence; there could exist divisions within sacred space without the virtual reality of profane space. If I read Gen 1–2 correctly, sacred space was everything this side of creation and profane space was the void relegated to nothingness by the act of creation. There was an initial disruption and distinction in profane space but after that disruption and distinction occurred within the scope of sacred space.

Strangely though, the Creator placed in the middle of the garden a tree which could easily and immediately catapult humankind back to profane space, »but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die« (2,17). Certainly death is the epitome of chaos and non-being, and death is the resultant punishment of profaning the sacred tree. Of course this is exactly what came to pass, but it is important to observe the manner in which profane space reentered this symmetrical world.

I have noted how the divine Creator spoke sacred space into existence to banish the chaos of profane space. The reversal of this redemptive foray was the result of the fall of humankind in Genesis 3. Humankind created in God's image gloriously named all the animals (2,19) and the human's counterpart (2,23). The poetry of 2,23 is particularly beautiful because it expresses in related terms the intimate connectedness of the different sexes. However, in Gen 3,1–7, the serpent tempts the woman not by explicitly lying to her but by enticing her to profane the tree which God had set apart »in the middle of the garden.« I say »not explicitly lying« because humankind did not die immediately, the man and woman did experience the knowledge of good and evil, and their eyes were opened just as the serpent had prophesied. I am fully aware of the verse in II Cor 11,3, »But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning ...« The question though must be asked as to how the serpent deceived Eve by its »cunning«. Is it not that the serpent representing primeval chaos utilized truth to entice humankind to profane that which the Lord God had set apart, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? The temptation then was more a seduction to cross the boundaries of the sacred which would in turn imbue existence with profane space.

Profane space, thus the fall of humankind, did not enter by the deception of Eve. Rather it entered through the silence of man with his refusal to speak into the chaos represented by the serpent. The reasons for believing the man to be there in silence while Eve and the serpent spoke with one another are threefold: (1) verse 6 explicitly states that Eve gave to her husband »who was with her« (*'imab*), (2) the entire passage is connected by the way consecutive in 3,1b, 2, 3, 4, 6, 6b, 7abc indicating the narrative unity and (3) the narrator thus views the husband as simultaneous within the narrative time of the pericope. Therefore the fall began not with Eve's deception but with the silence of the man which was the exact reversal of the Creator's speaking into chaos to banish the profane space. At the point when the serpent interjected seduction and confusion, the man possessed the opportunity to be »creative« in two ways, positive and negative. Adam could have been creative by speaking to counteract the serpent – to create *ex nihilo* – and creative as the primogenitor in speaking word as sacred space to expel the profane space incarnated by the serpent. The consequence of Adam's determined lack of communication was the immediate loss of communion with his wife and his God.

Immediately after eating the fruit the eyes of the man and the woman were opened, and 3,7 states that »they knew they were naked.« Gen 2,25 stipulates that pre-fall humankind was naked but there was no shame in the difference of their nakedness. Now as a result of the profanation, difference leads to shame which in turn leads to disorientation and silence. The man and woman hide their most private and unique anatomical distinc-

tions with clothing (3,7), and they hide from the creator as he warmly seeks them (3,8–9). Shame as a result of profane space no longer allows the presence of relationship – silence is the consequence of silence. The human body and sexuality – which was the act of converging the otherness into oneness – was no longer viewed as sacred space.²³ Humankind must then dismember and silence the bodies of others to remove difference.

No longer would the sacred exist in perfect form and without existential tension on this earth, and no longer would humankind have direct access to the world of the sacred. With the expulsion of humankind from the garden, from sacred space, came the loss of difference, orientation, and communication. Humankind thus lives within a world that commingles sacred and profane space within every entity of his or her existence. That being the case, humankind is compelled to live in the midst of the ambiguity and the ambivalence it evokes. Homogeneity is worshipped and difference is a threat that must be exterminated, therefore sexism, racism, and genocide. Orientation is stifling and something to be thrown off or it is to be neurotically idolized in an attempt to dissolve the chaos of life. And communication is both feared and championed: feared because humankind is not comfortable with presence or absence, so speech becomes silence or violence, and championed in such a way that leads wholly otherness exclusively toward the self. And yet, humankind made in the image of God – humankind as sacred space – yearns for the recapturing of the tensionless sacred space that once was theirs. Difference, orientation, and communication are divinely imparted archetypes that terrify humankind but at the same time cannot be resisted.

Intrinsic to the very nature of sacred space is the purpose for which it is believed to be true and active within the community. Ancient Israel as previously exhibited based their cosmogony on a profound understanding of sacred space as foundational to their comprehension of themselves, their God, and their relationships. According to Genesis 3 and subsequent narratives, humankind does not exist in perfect harmony with sacred space. Their God no longer »walks in the cool of the evening« and so humanity must seek redemptive wholeness through other means than the direct presence that the garden afforded. Thus Israel's writing and liturgies demonstrate the compelling need to return to the sacred space of bygone days.

Eliade has warned us of the modern tendency to live in a »desacralized« world that repudiates sacred space as irrelevant or nonexistent. The results of profaning sacred space can be observed in both ancient and modern times. The nations outside of Israel and eventually Israel itself practiced the sacrifice of humans which was a radical reversion of the overarching intention of sacred space.²⁴ The very nadir of the Old Testament is the story of a Levite (set apart to render wholeness by sacrifice) dismembering his own wife in a grotesque ritual (Jud 19–20). The disembodiment of the concubine embodied the dissolution of society itself by an inward unraveling of a basic fiber of society – sacred space as protection of individual boundaries! The profaning of sacred space by modern society is readily discerned on the news, in the newspapers, and the weekly magazines. Racism and sexism are typical embodiments of the melding of sacred space into profane space. Though modern humankind is radically different from his or her ancestor, s/he is still created in the image of the Sacred and embodies sacred space. Consequently, modern humanity should be consumed with the eternal quest for the recovery of the sacred, for then and only then will there be distinction *for* the other, orientation for stability, and communication for redemption which is the essence of life itself.

²³ For an insightful treatment of the body as sacred space see Detweiler, op. cit., 122–58.

²⁴ Alberto R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (1975).

We will begin our treatment of sacred space and its relevance to the Genesis cosmogony with a renewed discussion of Mircea Eliade's conception of sacred space. Then, utilizing a synthesis of Eliade's understanding, I propose that sacred space as a philosophical and theological construct offers difference, orientation, and communication to a postmodern age characterized by nihilism and disorientation. Furthermore, the creation account as portrayed in Gen 1–3 recounts a God who breaks into a chaotic, profane world to provide sacred space within the created order and more importantly within humanity by virtue of the divine image. The reversal of this created order enters human existence at the point where man and woman disobey the injunction not to eat of the sacred tree. This profanation then, according to the Genesis account, leads to humanity desacrilizing sacred space resulting in the obliteration of difference, orientation, and communication evidenced in modern times by such ideologies as racism and sexism. Consequently, sacred space as stipulated in Gen presents wholeness and meaning to fragmented, profane existence.