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Genesis 1-11: A Narrative Theological Commentary

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JAMES CHUKWUMA OKOYE, C.S.SP. *GENESIS 1—11. A NARRATIVE-THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY*. EUGENE, OREGON: CASCADE, 2018.

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A narrative approach means that the commentary is on the level of the final form of the text. However, wherever there is need to enlighten the meaning or explain “gaps,” the so-called “sources” are invoked. The commentary is theological in the sense that the question of meaning for life and our relationship with God and fellow humans is foremost. “The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (Augustine). However, the Christian spiritual sense need not be imposed on the text for non-Christian readers. Ecumenically conscious, this commentary isolates two movements of the literal meaning and the spiritual sense as handed on in Christianity and Judaism. **Commentary** is thus separated from **Tradition**. The author stands in the Catholic tradition.

There are four movements in the interpretation. Ancient Mesopotamian myths underlying some of the tradition are confronted with the biblical text to show how the biblical writer articulates his faith using the material of the culture – a model for our theologizing today. The text itself is considered in its use of language and how it uses language to achieve certain effects (poetics). In service of this, intertexts within the Old Testament itself are sometimes considered. There follows the section on Tradition, in which the ongoing life of the text in the Christian and Jewish communities are considered, especially in the period of the early fathers of the church and earlier rabbis. To be borne in mind is that until mid-second century, “Scripture” for the church meant the Old Testament. Christ was preached from the Old Testament. Hence, the theology of the New Testament grew from the Old Testament. Jewish-Christian debates on the text of the Old Testament highlight the theological meanings that Christians and Jews were reading from the text. Each side reacted to the interpretations of the other, and sometimes adjusted its own interpretations to rebut the claims of the other, but always in line with each one’s orthodoxy.

My hope is that this commentary will not only aid Christian and Jew to see how current doctrines grew from the Old Testament, but also facilitate ongoing dialogue between the two brother faiths. Patristic and rabbinic hermeneutics of the Old Testament within their times and culture challenge us to today to theological hermeneutics for the life of our own generation.

I have in mind particularly the needs of seminarians and graduates, pastors and preachers, who sow the Word. Fellow scholars may even gain some insight here and there, although my aim has been theological and pastoral than advancing the science as such.

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