

Let me give what I think is a result of my and Frans Van Liere's presentations of the histories of the origins and interpretations of the creation texts. The original meaning of the texts, established by the writer-composers of the 6th-5th c. B. C. was doxological (Genesis 1) and anti-mythological wisdom/fable (Genesis 1-3), to be understood in the context of the various Axial Age intellectual-prophetic movements toward the disenchantment of the material world (cosmos)*. In the long period from the fifth century B. C. to the Reformation the original sense of these texts was 'buried' in the constant re-formation of meaning as explained in Frans Van Liere's lecture: Liturgical, Christological, re-mythologized (*Apocryphon of John*), Augustinian-Aristotelian, allegorical-mystical, "Renaissance-literal" (my invented term for the assumption of historical veracity based on common sense rather than on material-science verification).

However, the modern enlightenment climate of meaning resulted in changed understanding and use of the creation accounts in two ways,

(1) as re-contextualized in their original setting through higher-critical textual study and archaeological contextual study, resulting in the history of meaning described in our papers, and challenging a simple historical veracity and/or

(2) as positivist literal explanations of origin reconcilable with the new explanations of natural science, which I would call "pseudo-literal"*** reading of the texts.

This historical overview makes clear that the texts we have canonized (declared sacred and unchangeable) have constantly evolving meanings relative to the needs of their current context. Rather than turn us into outright scriptural relativists, this fresh understanding of the history of the semiotic process ought to give us better guidance as to what acceptable options of understanding the text we have available, as well as what options should be rejected. For example, as Frans pointed out, the re-mythologizing of Genesis 1 in so-called Gnostic texts was found unacceptable as the Church followed Irenaeus and Augustine. Similarly we are finding at least the positivist 'pseudo-literal' literal understanding of the text unacceptable (and the 'Renaissance literal', but as Frans made clear, we are now confused as to what acceptable meaning of the creation stories will fit our current climate of opinion and need. He suggested we could benefit from going back to the more mystical meanings in vogue in the pre-Hugh-of-St.-Victor medieval world.

That suits me personally, but others will insist that we have standards that lock us in, viz., the Confessions, which also have a sort of canonical status in our community. Now, what should become clear from the above use of the history of meaning (or "politics of memory") is that what's good for Genesis is also good for the Confessions. Their original meaning is by-and-large set in the stage of Renaissance-literal (assuming historical veracity of the ancient texts). The question then is whether we can retain that 'literal' meaning of the Confessions if our critical-archaeological contextual study of the creation texts has assigned them with meanings that exclude their simple historicity.

My recommendation is that we seek to answer that by subjecting our Confessions to the same historical-contextual scrutiny we have been applying to the Biblical text itself. It is clear to me that studies of material evidence – archaeology, biology, etc. – have triggered drastic revisions in our understanding of the Biblical text. The same should happen for the Confessions.

*Cf. Marcel Gauchet, *The Disenchantment of the World* (1999, trans. of *Le désenchantement du monde*, 1985)

***My distinction between "Renaissance-literal" and "pseudo-literal" is certainly open to critique from those much better versed in the early modern period than I am.