

# Timothy Ministries News & Insight

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## The Creation Conversation And The Supremely Obedient Son



Much scholarly debate has focused upon the plural pronouns of Genesis 1.26: “Let **Us** make man in **Our** image, according to **Our** likeness...” Liberal commentators, and many conservatives, have hastened to explain to us that the plural pronouns, *us* and *our*, have no reference to the multiple persons of the Trinity, since any Trinitarian insight was “certainly beyond the horizon of the editor of Genesis” (so says Gordon J. Wenham in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1). Many have written that in the creation narrative God used a “royal plural” or “plural of majesty,” but this was disproven by Hebrew scholarship in the last century. Consequently other unbiblical hypotheses have been proposed, like the idea that God was addressing the angels, etc.

It turns out that the disavowals of a Trinitarian background for the plural pronouns of Genesis 1.26 have more to do with the commentators’ presuppositions regarding biblical inspiration and the authorship of Genesis than with the Hebrew text. Contrasting with the liberal perspective, a

view of inspiration that assumes God Himself as the direct or guiding author of Genesis 1 should lead us to expect that *some* hint of triune involvement would be embedded in the story of the universe’s origin!

In fact, Genesis, like its bookend counterpart in the canon, the Revelation, is a highly Trinitarian book. Sometimes, though, scholarly bias obscures the more subtle theological content of these books. Indeed, many commentaries have neglected to draw our attention to the bulk of the divine conversation in Genesis 1. While the debate has centered on Genesis 1.26, the conversation begins in Genesis 1.3!

With the words, “Let there be light,” the Father begins directing the Son in His work of creation. We know this partly because of the Hebrew verb

form used in the sentence. The Hebrew verb, “let-be,” is in the jussive form. The jussive is an indirect command regarding a 3rd-person object. This means that God did not address the (non-existent) light, but addressed someone else *about* the light. God used this verb form with Moses at the Red Sea, when He said, “Let the sons of Israel go into the midst of the sea on dry land” (Ex 14.16). The verb, “let-go,” often poorly translated as a simply future, is a command (or expression of intent) regarding what the Israelites should do, but it is not spoken directly to the Israelites (in the 2nd person). It is spoken *about* the Israelites (in the 3rd person) *to* Moses.

Of course, in the creation narrative, the 2nd-person addressee of God’s indirect commands is not named. Only God’s Spirit has been mentioned (Genesis 1.2), and so from the Genesis text alone we would not be amiss to assume that the Father gave these directives to the Holy Spirit. However, subsequent revelation, like the statements of John 1.3 and Colossians 1.16, assure us that it is the eternal Word, God’s beloved Son,

through whom “all things came into being.” It was God the Son, *in the power of the Holy Spirit*, who fulfilled the Father’s instructions in the creation.

Twelve jussive verbs in the Genesis 1 creation narrative preserve for us the directives given by the Father to the Son as follows:

- “Let there be light ...” (v. 3)
- “Let there be an expanse ...” (v. 6)
- “Let it separate ...” (v. 1.6)
- “Let the waters be gathered ...” (v. 9)
- “Let the dry land appear ...” (v. 9)
- “Let the earth produce ...” (v. 11)
- “Let there be luminaries ...” (v. 14)
- “Let the waters swarm ...” (v. 20)
- “Let birds fly ...” (v. 20)
- “Let birds multiply ...” (v. 22)
- “Let the earth produce living creatures (v. 24)
- “Let [man] rule ...” (v. 26)

The conversation seems one-sided to us, because the text records no *verbal* response to the divine directives. Indeed, some commentators have dismissed the “Let there be” statements as “impersonal” decrees. In the Hebrew Scriptures, however, whenever God speaks, employing jussive verbs, it is always to a 2nd-person addressee. We realize, therefore, that these decrees are not “impersonal,” but are answered by creative actions. The Logos, the Word personified, answers by doing. For each of the Father’s directives, there is an active response, usually indicated by the words, “and there was ...,” or “and it was so.”

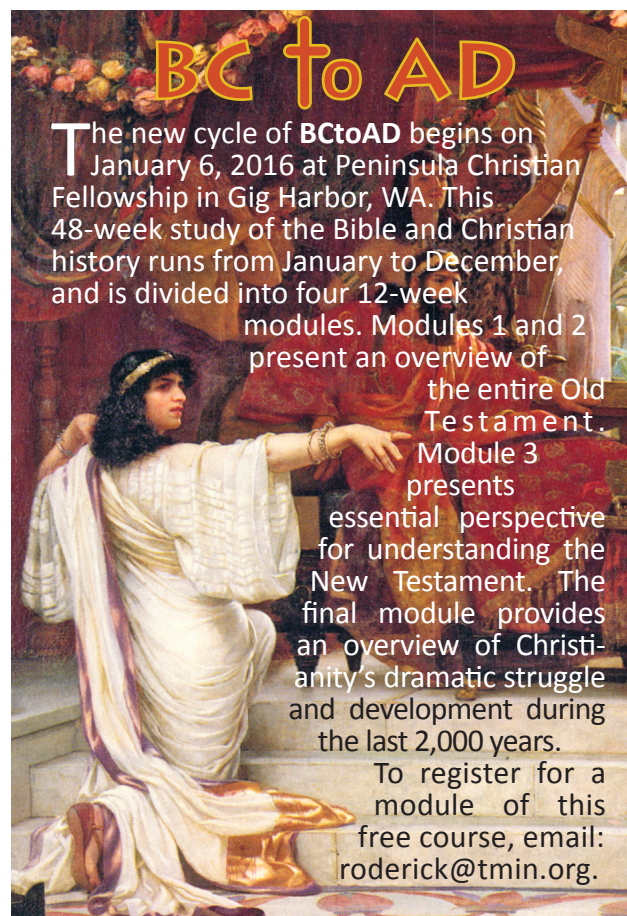
The Genesis 1 conversation *culminates* in the famous 26th verse, **not with a jussive verb but with a cohortative verb**. A cohortative verb expresses a wish, intention or command in the first person, addressed to one’s self or one’s group. In this case the cohortative verb is plural, “Let-**Us**-make.” When all the preceding jussive verbs are taken into account, we see that God did not suddenly begin speaking to Himself with a plural of majesty! Much less did He use a “plural of self-deliberation,” as if God had to make up His mind, or a plural of “self-encouragement,” as if He had to get up the nerve (again see Wenham, p. 28). God had been speaking to a second Person (or Persons, if also to the Holy Spirit) all along, and the Father now gives the instruction

that He and that other One (or Ones) fashion man in *their image together*.

All this serves to remind us that the Person born in Bethlehem is from eternity and has interacted intimately with our world from the beginning. It also reminds us that the Son did indeed “empty Himself” of His divine prerogatives (Philippians 2.7), for the Jesus who hungered and wept had previously flung the stars into their places. Furthermore, while Jesus learned a certain kind of obedience by the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5.8), His readiness to do the Father’s will was not a new discipline, but His eternal character. The Son *always* did “the things that are pleasing” to the Father (John 8.29). He *always* did “exactly as the Father commanded” him (John 14.31).

So, when the Father called for light, the Son created light. When the Father required atonement for man’s sins, the Son willingly laid down His life because “this commandment [He] received from [His] Father” (John 10.18).

❖ Roderick Graciano



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