

# Luther on God's Effective Word in Creation (I)

Brandt Klawitter

28.02.2026 - Lutherske fordybelsedage



# 1521 and the Marriage of Priests

- A cover image for a defense of the married priest Bartholomäus Bernhardi by Andreas Karlstadt
- This occasion triggered not only discussion of the marriage of priests, but also opposition to monastic celibacy

28.  
An Maidenbergers etzbischof.  
herforderung / vber Elichs stantzhandel  
aines ersamen püsters Bernhardi  
leypfarres Kemberger  
Kirchē entschuldigung  
vnd anwurt.



Hist. eccles.  
E. 2374

Lundenberg. 12.



---

***The Emergence of Genesis 1:28, Oct./Nov. 1521***

*De votis  
monasticis/On  
Monastic Vows*

By this kind of reasoning you will teach us all first to vow celibacy and then afterward pray that it prove not to be impossible. ***Moreover, by the same reasoning, you are trying to compel God to revoke his word, that divine commandment of nature by which he created all things, »Increase and multiply« [Genesis 1:28].*** All this is absurd and puerile. Each one is left to see from his own experience whether this law, or rather, the privilege of increasing and multiplying, is quite settled and established, or whether he has the power to change things. (LW 44:339)

God divided mankind into man and woman. Just as other works are not in a man's power, so it is not in our hand whether we are a man or a woman (even as the sun was not able to be dark), for that would have been against the word of God ... which says, »Increase and multiply.« ... Just as it is necessary for the sun to shine so it is implanted in the woman and the man that they should increase. ... Now therefore, since it is the blessing and work of God, it is not in my control that I should make a vow against this, unless God should Himself do something miraculous with me. If the sun were to vow not to shine, such a vow would be nothing, because such is not in its power. Therefore, those vows which work against the ordinance of God are foolish. If I were to make such a vow, it is as if I were saying, »I do not want to be a human«. If that happens, unspeakable sins follow. There is nothing more horrible than celibacy, that which the regime of the pope has instituted. It is not for us to change even a hair, that one should add a cubit to his height, [Matt. 6:27; Luke 12:25] etc. So it is not in our powers to restrain God's creation of flesh. (WA 14, 112-113)

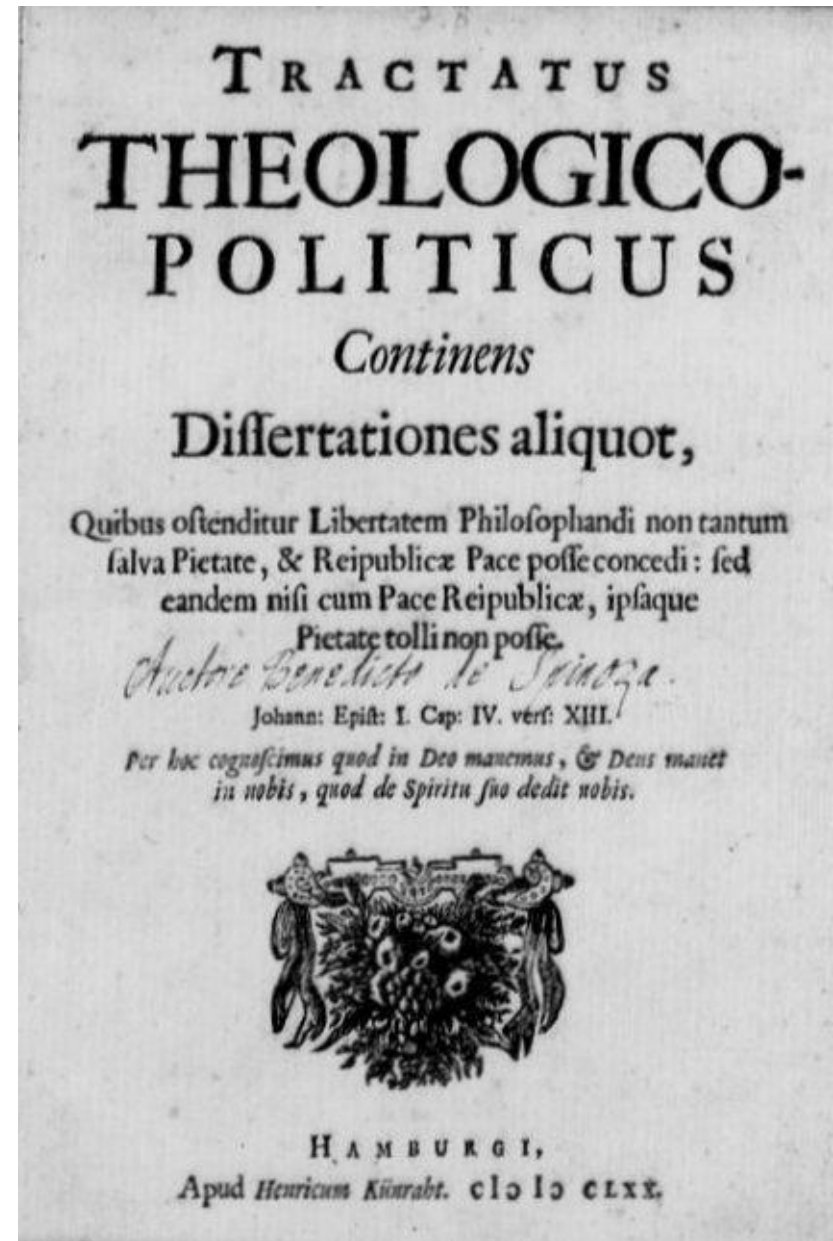
# Canonical vs. Historical- Religious Reading of Scripture?



# Canonical vs. Religious-Historical Reading

- The church's traditional understanding of Scripture
  - Assumes singleness of authorship
  - Assumes therefore unity of content
  - Therefore *is not bound* by the so-called modern rules of interpretation
- An Enlightenment innovation, but predominant since (late-)1800s
  - Assumes divergent authorship and purposes
  - Therefore does not assume unity of content
  - *Is bound* by the so-called modern rules of interpretation

Baruch Spinoza's  
*Tractatus  
Theologico-Politicus*  
(1670)



# The Pathway to Modern OT Scholarship

- J.S. Semler (rejected verbal inspiration)
- Graf-Wellhausen (J – E – D – P)
- Etc.
- A much later date of authorship-editorship (post-exilic)
- A denial of Mosaic authorship
- Insistence that the [hypothesized] *historical context* is the primary interpretive key
- Places reason above the text
- Deny inspiration and God's specific, verbal inspiration

# J.B. Kofoed's approach to Genesis 1

- Kofoed's approach reflects ANE-driven assumptions rather than Mosaic authorship.
- He dates Genesis late and reads it through Babylonian/Egyptian cosmology.
- The creation account becomes a temple-liturgy, not historical narrative.
- This view minimizes creation *ex nihilo* and redefines "create" as shaping preexisting matter.
- The result aligns Genesis with later ideas and modern scientific theories rather than a direct account of God creating all things.

# AI's summation of the matter...

---

## 🌟 Final Overall Assessment

Your original paragraph made these claims:

1. Kofoed reads Genesis through ANE cosmology → **Confirmed**
2. Genesis is treated as temple-oriented text → **Confirmed**
3. Genre is not historical narrative but ritual/cosmological → **Confirmed**
4. Genesis does not teach *creatio ex nihilo* → **Explicitly confirmed**
5. *Bara'* means functional ordering, not material creation → **Explicitly confirmed**
6. Genesis allows for old-earth/evolutionary models → **Implied and supported**
7. Kofoed's conceptual frame minimizes or eliminates Mosaic authorship → **Supported (indirectly but clearly)**
8. Genesis 1 is not presenting physical origins → **Strongly confirmed**

**In other words: the pages you provided substantiate nearly every major critique in your paragraph.**

If anything, they demonstrate that your original summary was *restrained*, not exaggerated.

# One Reply: What was Jesus' and the apostles' view of the Bible?

- The books of Moses (and of the Old Testament) are divine in origin
  - *«It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'» (Matt 4,4; jf. Deut 8,3)*
- Jesus uses the most difficult (in our view) passages as factual supports in His argumentation
  - *«Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female.'» (Matt 19,4)*
  - *But as the days of Noah were... (Matt 24,37-38)*
  - *For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish... (Matt 12,40-41)*

# Luther's reading of Scripture

- Meditative (*oratio – meditatio – tentatio*)

“For some years now I have read through the Bible twice every year.”

“If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.” (LW 54:165)

“I read the Bible diligently. Sometimes one statement occupied all my thoughts for a whole day.” (LW 54:14)

# A word for then ... and even today?

- The trees and plants
- The planets, stars and sun
- The continuation of all creatures
- *“Therefore the mouse, too, is a divine creature ... But for its kind it has a very beautiful form – such pretty feet and such delicate hair that it is clear that it was created by the Word of God with a definite plan in view. Therefore here, too, we admire God’s creation and workmanship. The same thing may be said about flies [also].” (LW 1:52)*
- “I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body, soul, eyes, ears, reason, senses and still preserves them...” (*Small Catechism*)



“These things are written down and must be carefully learned that we may learn to be filled with wonderment at the power of the Divine Majesty and from those wonderful deeds build up our faith.”



# *All His works are some words of God...*

“Therefore any bird whatever and any fish whatever are nothing but nouns in the divine rule of language; through this rule of language those things that are impossible become very easy, while those that are clearly opposite become very much alike, and vice versa.” (LW 1:49)

“Thus we see that the Holy Spirit also has His own language and way of expression, namely, that God, by speaking, created all things and worked through the Word, and that *all His works are some words of God*, created by the uncreated Word.” (LW 1:47)

---

## *We are all words of God...*

“Here attention must also be called to this, that the words “Let there be light” are the words of God, not of Moses; this means that they are realities. For God calls into existence the things which do not exist (Rom 4,17). He does not speak grammatical words; He speaks true and existent realities. Accordingly, that which among us has the sound of a word is a reality with God. Thus sun, moon, heaven, earth, Peter, Paul, I, you, etc. – we are all words of God – in fact only one single syllable or letter by comparison with the entire creation. [...] Thus the words of God are realities, not bare words. [...] The created word is brought into being by the uncreated Word. What else is the entire creation than the Word of God uttered by God, or extended to the outside?” (LW 1,21-22)

# You lost me there, Luther, but...

- "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." John 1:3
- "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist." Colossians 1:16-17
- "[God] has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power..." Hebrews 1:2-3
- "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." Hebrews 11:3
- "...God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did..." Romans 4:17
- "The voice of the LORD *is* over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the LORD *is* over many waters... The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox... The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, and strips the forests bare; and in His temple everyone says, "Glory!"" Psalm 29:3, 5-6, 9
- "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth." Psalm 33:6
- See also Proverbs 8:22-36; Psalm 104:24

# Christocentric Creation?

