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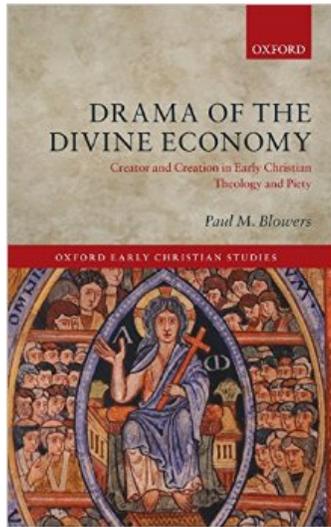
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Paul M. Blowers

Drama of the Divine Economy: Creator and Creation in Early Christian Theology and Piety
(Oxford Early Christian Studies)

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012

Pp. xv + 424. ISBN: 978-0-199-66041-4.
\$160.00 [Hardback]. Purchase

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In his work, *The Drama of the Divine Economy*, Paul M. Blowers, the Dean E. Walker Professor of Church History at Emmanuel Christian Seminary, explores early Christian theology of creation. His approach, however, is intentionally synthetic and attempts “to outline some of the interconnected dimensions of the early Christian vision of creation” and “to explore some of the ways in which that vision informed, and was informed by, Christian practice” (p.5). Blowers recognizes the anachronistic tendency in many modern systematic treatments of the fathers that disconnect the unifying threads of their theological systems. Thus, Blowers approaches their theology of creation from the assumption that it was not formed “in isolation but in a normative relation to God’s overall salvific action in the world” (p.2). Their doctrines of creation were intrinsically connected to their

other views including their Christology, pneumatology, and eschatology.

After the introduction, the argument of the book begins with two chapters that establish the theological and philosophical background by surveying the cosmology and cosmogony inherited from the Graeco-Roman philosophy and Hellenistic Judaism. These philosophical traditions competed with the theology of the Fathers, especially in terms of their views on *teleology*, creationism, and *archai*. In a similar way, Hellenistic-Judaism, received through the legacies of Philo and Wisdom of Solomon, also contributed, among other things, an emphasis on the “closed world” system, the teleological principle, and the mediating function of Wisdom in creation. Blowers also gives special attention to Philo’s model of “double creation” that influences the thinking of several fathers and imagines the whole creation as originally conceived in the divine Mind prior to the formation of the sensible world (p.54–58). In light of these intellectual backgrounds, chapter four discusses some of the pressing hermeneutical challenges for the Christian articulation of the doctrine of creation in the first three centuries.

Chapters 5–8 substantiate his thesis by exploring the “intertextual connections between and among the Bible’s diverse witness to Creator and creation” and does so by mining the texts of Gen 1–2 “for their seemingly inexhaustible *sensus plenior*” (p.101). He is not interested in dividing their interpretations along the literal/allegorical lines, but instead distinguishes between analytical and doxological approaches to creation. In chapter 7, he observes the intertextual interpretation of creation texts in the fathers that link Genesis with a variety of other scriptures including: Psalms, Deutero-Isaiah, the Wisdom literature, and Rom 8:19–23. He also gives a focused treatment of the constellation of New Testament passages that introduce the “cosmic Christ” and “new

creation” themes, and give attention to the “triune Creator’s ‘performances’ in enacting the new creation through the joint initiatives of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit” (p.307). The last chapter reflects on the practical interface between a theology of creation and Christian piety and worship. Blowers argues that the doctrine of creation was not established merely through biblical or theological argumentation, but through application in liturgical and sacramental practice in the life of the faithful. Finally, in his epilogue, Blowers brings all these themes together under the Balthasarian paradigm of “theo-drama” as a means to comprehend the various features of the patristic vision of creation that was and is continually unfolding within the divine economy.

Blowers’s treatment contributes to a stream of important works on the theology of creation in the patristic period including, Richard Norris’s *God and World in Early Christianity*, Gerhard May’s *Creatio ex nihilo: Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian thought*, and Peter Bouteneff’s *Beginnings: Ancient Christian Readings of the Biblical Creation Narratives*. Each of these contributions reflect on the theological/philosophical, doctrinal, and exegetical aspects of the creation in Gen 1–2, respectively. These works are complemented by a number of other works on the theology and exegesis of creation texts in particular patristic writers such as Irenaeus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa. Blowers’s work, on the other hand, is more synthetic. Drawing from these works, he recognizes that for the fathers there are “deep interconnections between creation and redemption in the divine economy” (p.189). As a result, the benefit of this study is a more unitive approach to the general patristic vision of creation that interacts with other important biblical themes and doctrines. In comparison to many modern philosophers of science, Blowers’s work is also helpful for providing a more sympathetic treatment of the fathers reading of

creation. Their approach to Gen 1-2 involved “spiritual contemplation,” that is distinguishable from modern scientific inquiry (p.4-5).

Anyone working on particular themes or passages in the patristic reading of Genesis 1-2 will find this work a helpful panorama of the way the fathers approached these texts within their ancient milieu. This synthetic approach, however, limits the discussion of important aspects of the father’s reading of Gen 1-2, such as their views on anthropology or soteriology—as Blowers acknowledges (p.vi). Regarding its technical features, the book is organized well and the subject index and scripture index are helpful, though readers would have also benefitted from an index of patristic citations and other ancient sources. This book will be helpful for anyone interested in the doctrine of creation or readings of Gen 1-2 in the early church and appropriate for a masters or doctoral course on theology of creation. At the same time, since it deals with the intrinsic connections between the theology of creation and other doctrines, it would also work well as a general introduction to the theology of the Fathers and the unifying nature of their theological projects.

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