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**Title:** "Genesis Cosmology and Sumerian Love Poetry"

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**Abstract:** (172 words) An original parallel poetic structure between the Hebrew creation account of Genesis 1 and the Sumerian love poem "A balbale to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana B)" is presented. Previous works have noted that Genesis 1 lacks the "theomachy," or divine conflict, present in the *Enuma Elish* and that the Hebrew God, unlike Marduk, remains omnipotent and unchallenged in Genesis; these differences have helped to clarify the theological intention of the priestly author. The findings of this present paper similarly challenge the exclusive influence of the *Enuma Elish* on Genesis 1. The presence of linguistic and structural features of love poetry in Genesis 1 helps to underscore the later Biblical theme of God's redemptive love and the covenant theology of worship. The connection between creation and temple is now imbued with a corresponding duty to love the creator, and the liturgical format of the creation account is now read as a balbale. These findings help to frame further questions about the liturgical purpose of the creation account, differentiating it from materialistic or physical creation cosmologies.

## **Genesis Cosmology and Sumerian Love Poetry**

Since the original publication of Hermann Gunkel's book *Schopfund und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* in 1895, the influence of the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish* on the Genesis creation account has been increasingly debated and contended by Biblical scholars. For example, John Walton has argued that theomachy, or Divine conflict, is not present in Genesis 1 as in the *Enuma Elish*, and therefore "we must seek an alternative cognitive environment for Genesis 1 in relation to the cosmogonic cognitive environment of the Ancient Near East."<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Gerhard Hasel has argued that "Genesis cosmology represents not only a 'complete break' with ancient Near Eastern mythological cosmologies but represents a parting of the spiritual ways brought about by a conscious and deliberate anti-mythical polemic which meant an undermining of the prevailing mythological cosmologies."<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the basic outline of the events of the *Enuma Elish* remains in Genesis, and so a discussion of the differences between the two texts helps to reveal the unique theological intention of the priestly author. This paper presents a novel rhetorical parallel between Genesis 1 and a Sumerian text. The inclusion of this Sumerian love poem, "A balbale to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana B)," suggests that an added feature in the Hebrew account is God's love for his creation, and in particular of mankind, revealing a unique theological understanding of God in comparison to the surrounding religious traditions.

The connecting phrases between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and "A Balbale to Inana" are a six-fold repetition of a cadence ending in "towb" (good) in Hebrew and "dug<sub>3</sub>/Ṭābu" in Sumerian or

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order out of Disorder after *Chaoskampf*." *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 55.

<sup>2</sup> Gerhard Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology." *Evangelical Quarterly* (1974): 91.

Akkadian, respectively. The repeated texts are “And God saw it was good (Hebrew - towb)” in Genesis and the phrase “Your charms are lovely (Sumerian - dug<sub>3</sub>, Akkadian – Ṭābu) found in the Sumerian love poem. The phonetic similarity between the Hebrew word, “towb,” and the Sumerian word, “dug<sub>3</sub>” and the repetitive related cadences support an influence of Sumerian love poetry on Genesis, in addition to the Enuma Elish. While a previous analysis of the rhetoric of Genesis 1 indicated that the priestly author was “creating distance from the audience”<sup>3</sup> through the image of God’s absolutely sovereignty, this literary parallel reveals that the priestly author also wanted to convey God’s intimate nearness to creation, as a lover who delights in its goodness. This highlights a unique characteristic of Hebrew theology with significant theological implications.

The seminal work of Hermann Gunkel had asserted the Babylonian origin of the priestly creation narrative, as a Hebrew poetic recension of the Marduk myth. This first Genesis-Sumerian connection, with Marduk, implied a theology of the "warrior God" in Genesis. The following modified chart of Heidel outlines the similarities<sup>4</sup>:

| <i>Enuma Elish</i>   | <i>Genesis</i>  |
|--|---|
| [1] Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal. (Tablet 1) | Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it (1:2)  |
| [2] Primaeval chaos; Ti’amat enveloped in darkness. (Tablet 2)               | The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep (tehom) (1:2) |
| [3] Light emanating from the gods. (Tablet 4)                                | Light created. (1:3)  |

<sup>3</sup> Allen Scult, Michael Calvin McGee, and J. Kenneth Kuntz. "Genesis and power: An analysis of the biblical story of creation." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72.2 (1986): 119.

<sup>4</sup> Alexander Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation*, Phoenix Books v. 133 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963): 129.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| [4] The creation of the firmament. (Tablet 5)   | The creation of the firmament. (1:6)            |
| [5] The creation of dry land. (Tablet 5)        | The creation of dry land. (1:9)                 |
| [6] The creation of the luminaries. (Tablet 5)  | The creation of the luminaries. (1:14)          |
| [7] The creation of man. (Tablet 5)             | The creation of man. (1:20)                     |
| [8] The gods rest and celebrate. (Final Tablet) | God rests and sanctifies the seventh day. (2:2) |

The similarities between the two accounts almost jump out of the page and suggest that both are derived from a common account of creation found in the ancient world. Numerous differences abound, nonetheless, and these differences help reveal the intent of the priestly author.

In a critical paper “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” Gerhard Hasel noted that certain key differences between the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis revealed that the author of Genesis was vigorously writing to counter certain Babylonian beliefs about the gods.<sup>5</sup> For example, in Genesis 1, “tehom” or the abyss, is an inanimate part of the cosmos, and not the foe of God, as the *Enuma Elish* had described of the “Ti’amat.” Similarly, unlike Ugaritic texts that describe Anath, the sister of Baal, “muzzling” the dragon “Tannin”, Genesis described the “tanninim” as aquatic creatures that were created by God and in no way threatening to him. Additionally, in Genesis, the separation of heaven and earth takes place without any struggle, and the luminaries are not made by Marduk from the slain Tiamat. Hasel concluded that “the first chapter of the Bible knows only of creation by an effortless, omnipotent, and unchallengeable divine word,”<sup>6</sup> clearly differentiating it from the Babylonian myth. However,

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<sup>5</sup> Hasel, 81-91.

<sup>6</sup> Hasel, 90.

the Marduk reference still suggests that God, while unchallenged, possessed the strength of a victorious warrior as in the Babylonian literature.

Scholars have previously noted the festive or liturgical character of Genesis 1:1-2:3, with its repeated refrains: “And God saw that it was good,” and also “it was evening and it was morning,” suggesting the text's use at a temple function.<sup>7</sup> The mention of the passing days may be attributable to the seven days of the temple sacrifices during the Feast of Booths as found in Leviticus 23:42, giving a liturgical pattern for the days of Genesis 1, but God’s repeated mention of the goodness of creation has not been given a particular reference in ancient texts or practices. Was the author of Genesis referencing an ancient literary motif in the six-fold repetition of the word Hebrew word 'towb'?

Adele Berlin's work has noted that Biblical literature seems to have borrowed two-line parallelism and the “particularizing principle” from Sumerian literature.<sup>8</sup> This device helps to focus attention on a particular word or phrase through its repeated and parallel use. This current paper now explores another Sumerian rhetorical device found in the poem “A balbale to Inana and Dumuzid (Dumuzid-Inana B) (verses 27-32), specifically, the repeated phrase acknowledging a beloved’s goodness using a Sumerian word similar to the Hebrew “towb.” The

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Morrow, "Work as Worship in the Garden and the Workshop: Genesis 1–3, the Feast of St. Joseph the Worker, and Liturgical Hermeneutics." *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 15.4 (2012): 159-178.

<sup>8</sup> Adele Berlin, "Shared Rhetorical Features in Biblical and Sumerian Literature." *The Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University New York, NY* 10 (1978): 35-42.

English text and Sumerian text are in columns below.<sup>9</sup>

| Sumerian Text  | English translation   |
|--|---|
| v.27 ul gur <sub>3</sub> -ru-ju <sub>10</sub> ul gur <sub>3</sub> -ru-ju <sub>10</sub> hi-li-zu<br><u>dug<sub>3</sub></u>    | My desirable one, my desirable one, your charms are lovely.                       |
| v.28 kiri <sub>6</sub> <sup>jic</sup> hachur-a ul gur <sub>3</sub> -ru-ju <sub>10</sub> hi-li-zu<br><u>dug<sub>3</sub></u>   | My desirable apple garden, your charms are lovely.                                |
| v.29 kiri <sub>6</sub> <sup>jic</sup> mes-a gurun il <sub>2</sub> -la-ju <sub>10</sub> hi-li-zu <u>dug<sub>3</sub></u>       | My fruitful garden of mes trees your charms are lovely.                           |
| v.30 du <sub>5</sub> -mu-zid-abzu ni <sub>2</sub> -te-na-ju <sub>10</sub> (ms: ni)hi-li-zu <u>dug<sub>3</sub></u>            | My one who is in himself Dumuzid-abzu, your charms are lovely.                    |
| v.31 dim <sub>3</sub> kug-ga-ju <sub>10</sub> dim <sub>3</sub> kug-ga-ju <sub>10</sub> hi-li-zu<br><u>dug<sub>3</sub></u>    | My holy statuette, my holy statuette, your charms are lovely.                     |
| v.32 dim <sub>3</sub> jic-nu <sub>11</sub> -gal suh za-gin <sub>3</sub> gir <sub>11</sub> hi-li-zu<br><u>dug<sub>3</sub></u> | My alabaster statuette adorned with a lapis-lazuli jewel, your charms are lovely. |

<sup>9</sup> "A balbale to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana B)." *The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature (ETCSL)*, 19 Dec. 2006. Web. 1 Feb. 2013 <<http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.4.08.02&display=Crit&charenc=gcirc#>>.

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|--|--|

In this poem, the Sumerian word for good, “dug<sub>3</sub>,” can be found in the eme-sal text, one of the two dialects of Sumerian recorded. The standard dialect is known as the eme-ĝir text; the eme-sal text is used exclusively by female characters in certain literary texts. When Sumerian words were adapted into Akkadian, they were oftentimes of the eme-sal variety, and it this dialect is thus considered to be the more colloquial variety.<sup>10</sup> The Sumerian word for good, “dug<sub>3</sub>,” is the last word of the all the lines from 27 to 32, while the eme-ĝir text uses the phrase “ze<sub>2</sub>-ba-am<sub>3</sub>” in place of this. This paper presents the eme-sal text because of their colloquial use and its phonetic similarity to the Hebrew “towb” via the Akkadian “tabu.”

Comparison of this poem parallel structure to Genesis reveals a uniquely Hebrew understanding of God—the suggestion of the language of a lover. While God ordered creation with reference to the warrior motif of Marduk, his response to it is that of a lover. The created objects in each line, gardens, trees, statues and jewels, do not directly parallel each other, but each section ends with an acknowledgement of the goodness (dug<sub>3</sub>/ towb) of the object in the lover’s gaze. This similarity is shown in the table below:

| <b>A balbale to Inana and Dumuzid (Dumuzid-Inana B)</b>                                       | <b>Genesis Creation account (Genesis 1:1-2:3)</b>   |
|---|---|
| v. 27 “My desirable one, my desirable one, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).” | v.1-8 Creation of light and darkness; separation of waters. v.4 “And God saw that it was good |

<sup>10</sup> Carl Ehrlich, *Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 31.

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | (Towb).”   |
| v.28 “My desirable apple garden, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).”                                 | v.9-12 Creation of land and plants. v.10 “And God saw that it was good (Towb).”      |
| v.29 “My fruitful garden of mes trees, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).”                           | v.14-18 Creation of luminaries. v.18 “And God saw it was good (Towb).”               |
| v. 30 “My one who is in himself Dumuzid-abzu, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).”                    | v. 20-21 Creation of sea creatures and birds. v.21 “And God saw it was good (Towb).” |
| v. 31 “My holy statuette, my holy statuette, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).”                     | v.24-25 Creation of land animals. v.25 “And God saw that it was good (Towb).”        |
| v. 32 “My alabaster statuette adorned with a lapis-lazuli jewel, your charms are lovely (Ṭābu/ dug <sub>3</sub> ).” | v. 26-31 Creation of humans. v.31 “And God saw it was very good (Towb).”             |

Just as the lover in the Sumerian poem repeatedly acknowledges the loveliness (Ṭābu/ dug<sub>3</sub>) of the object of his admiration, so also in Genesis 1, we are repeatedly told that God observes that his creation is good or lovely (towb).

Most current translations of Genesis obscure the language of love contained in these verses of Genesis. Even within Genesis the word “towb” is often translated in the sense of lovely or pleasurable or desirable. For example, in Genesis 6:2 “the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were fair (towb).” In Genesis 24:16, “the maiden was very fair (towb) to look upon, a virgin, whom no man had known.” Later books of the Bible also made use of “towb” to indicate something desirable or pleasurable: “He who finds a wife finds a good (towb) thing, and obtains favor from the LORD.” (Proverbs 18:22). Here we see that the Hebrew word chosen by the

priestly author to describe God's view of creation is the same word used by a man toward a desirous and pleasing woman. Noting the varied uses of "towb" again reinforces these parallels that Genesis 1 contains linguistic ideas with elements of a love poem. Further, this basis and use of the word 'towb' may suggest that creation is feminine and receptive to God's further creative work.

While this comparison reveals that God may be said to be a lover of his creation, Scripture elsewhere reveals that this does not indicate that God has some deficiency which he needs to complete by union with the beloved. This is an important philosophical distinction in Judeo-Christian theology. God's love of creation is for a beloved, who cooperates with his will but is not necessary for him to achieve his will. Psalm 50, for example, describes how God lacks nothing material that creation can supply: "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving..." (Ps 50:13-14a). The sense in which God enjoys the goodness or loveliness (*dug<sub>3</sub>*, *towb*) of his creation is as something contingent upon him that only pleases him by returning to him in thanksgiving. The feminine form of the Sumerian used, the *eme-sal* variety, should not mislead us to think that creation's receptivity perfectly parallels the biblical conception of men and women; rather, it merely suggests an openness to new life that is particularly pleasing when it returns in gratitude. This connection to the Sumerian love poetry confirms that God desires that his creation achieve its consummate end and be united to him, as a lover to his beloved, perhaps as completely as in the martial rapture.

In a seminal essay "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," Gerhard von Rad claimed that "because of the exclusive commitment of Israel's faith to historical salvation, *the doctrine of creation* was never able to attain to independent existence

in its own right.”<sup>11</sup> A similar theological interpretation was offered by the Pontifical Biblical commission in 2001: “*The creative action of God is the foundation and assurance of the salvation to come*, likewise in prayer (Ps 121:2), as well as in the pronouncements of the prophets, for example in Jr 5:22 and 14:22. In Is 40-55, this creative action is the basis of hope for a salvation to come.”<sup>12</sup> The story of creation is not about the mechanical workings in creation, but of a saving God who seeks to restore the original work of creation. This parallel to the Sumerian poem “A balbale to Inana (Dumuzid-Inana B)” complements these hermeneutics by outlining a linguistic connection to love poetry, with God powerfully “wooing” or “summoning” an object of his redemptive love. While Genesis 1 describes the Hebrew account of creation, it is more oriented toward a description of God's love, irrespective of physical or material creation, in order to convey a Creator whose nature would be to redeem.

The notion that creation and salvation are intimately connected in the Bible helps to clarify why we could find a similarity between Genesis 1 and the “Balbale to Inana and Dumuzid.” Theologically, God’s creative work is seen as the work of a great redeemer; an unloving creator would never bother to save, restore or intervene in his creation. The rhetorical use of “*towb/dug<sub>3</sub>*” from Sumerian love poetry adds to the *Enuma Elish* account the theological doctrine of a loving—God is not simply battling to tame wild primeval chaos. He is metrically working to court us in His love by emphasizing: “you are good”, “you are good”, “you are good”, etc. This also clarifies why Genesis does not dwell on details of creation: it is meant to establish the uniqueness of the Hebrew God compared to the surrounding gods, by upholding first his absolute sovereignty and, perhaps more importantly, his intimate and redemptive love of

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<sup>11</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E.W. Trueman Dicken (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 142-143, emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

creation. Properly speaking, Genesis 1 is not a scientific account, but a polemic against the pagan creation accounts of the ancient near East that did not recognize that God’s fundamental nature and power to be love.

Because of the Hebrew connection between creation and salvation, it is also interesting that Genesis 1 serves as the background for the building of the temple. This was observed by Rabbi Moshe Weinfeld in the following parallel<sup>13</sup>:

| <b>Exodus 39-40</b>   | <b>Genesis 1-2</b>  |
|---|---|
| And when Moses saw that they had performed all the tasks as the Lord had commanded, so they had done. (39:43) | And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. (1:31)  |
| Thus was completed all the work of the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. (39:32)                             | The heaven and the earth were completed in all their array. (2:1) |
| When Moses had finished the work. (40:33)   | God finished the work which He had been doing. (2:2)              |
| Moses blessed them. (39:43)   | And God blessed [...] (2:3)                                       |
| [...] to sanctify it and all its furnishings. (40:9)  | And sanctified it. (2:3)  |

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<sup>13</sup> Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbath, Temple and the Enthronement of the Lord – The Problem of the Sitz im Leben of Genesis 1:1-2:3.” *Melanges bibliques et orientaux en l’honneur de M. Henri Cazelles*, ed. A. Caquot and M. Delcor, (Kevelaer, Germany: Verlag Butzon & Bercker, 1981), 503.

These parallels between creation and the temple reveal that the doctrine of creation was simultaneously taught to affirm the Hebrew God as the creator and provide a corresponding basis to our duty to praise him. Additionally, this paper can contend that the connection between creation and a love poem indicates that creation and temple are biblically outlined to imply a duty to love God in our acts of worship. If temple worship reflects the Creator's initial pattern of work, we are responding to him not only in his power, but perhaps more importantly, in his love as in an almost romantic poem. He has summoned us by singing to us with his repetitive: "you are good", "you are good", "you are good", etc.

This theme in which creation is a physical symbolic of a loving and redemptive God was later developed in the Song of Songs: "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Enge'di. Behold, you are beautiful, my love; behold, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves" (Song 1:14-15). When Genesis 1 is read as a poem of God's love for his creation, the meaning of the Song of Songs also becomes more clear. In Genesis 1, God loves all his works and sees in them his own creative goodness that he desires the good of. The Song of Songs is a response to this creative love of God. The bride desires her bridegroom first revealed in creation, whose beauty seems to be represented by the entire natural world that surrounds her. All of creation is a sign of this love, both from creator to creature, and from creature to creator. Can the Song of Songs be read as a response to Genesis: "You are good, Lord", "You are good, Lord", "You are good, Lord", etc.?

Balbales have been thought to be a poetic form that corresponds to the Sumerian verb 'bal,' a word meaning "to converse, to exchange words" and thus were thought to be musical

duets.<sup>14</sup> In a presumably public performance, the poem presented above involved a romantic exchange. If the Genesis creation account were employed in temple ceremonies, it thus seems that the “conversation, or exchange of words” was between God and his creation, again indicating that God loved his works in a deeply romantic sense - "You are good my creation" and in response "Lord, You are good" - with each desiring the good of the other. Thus the Hebrew temple ceremonies involved elements of both duty to worship God's power and to respond to God's love. By recognizing that God's creative work is one of a great lover in addition to a sovereign creator, the reader sees that Genesis 1 is a bold assertion of this duty to love God, polemically opposing the often wicked and arguably unlovable gods of the surrounding nations.

In a study of Hebrew poetry, Adele Berlin has noted that “scholars of comparative literature who have searched for a universal definition of poetry have noticed that poetic lines tend to be shorter and terser than lines of prose. [...] Whatever the reason, poetry has a tendency to be more terse, more concise, than non-poetic discourse, both within a single line and in the case of biblical poetry, over the discourse as a whole.”<sup>15</sup> When Genesis 1 is seen to be in the genre of a love poem, we can understand its simplicity and lack of details about the material basis of creation. Lovers tend to overlook details and write in simplified language; thus, Genesis 1 should not be expected to be in the same category of writing as a modern account of the formation of the universe. Compared to the *Enuma Elish*, numbering greater than 500 lines, the Genesis 1 creation account, at only 34 lines, clearly seems to be in the form of poetry, instead of an epic, and is written as the rhythmic stanzas of a lover. Perhaps truncating the *Enuma Elish* and adding the well-known motif of the "Balbale to Inana and Dumuzid" was meant to further the

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<sup>14</sup> Carl Ehrlich, *Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 64.

<sup>15</sup> Adele Berlin, "Introduction to Hebrew Poetry." *The New Interpreter's Bible* 4 (1996), 303.

variation from the *Enuma Elish* to make evident the differences with the Marduk story. It can rightly be read as a polemic against ancient creation stories of a warrior, to reveal that God is primarily a lover, perhaps the most the foundational truth of Judeo-Christian thought.

John Walton has suggested that “the current controversy between Genesis and science is [...] based on a flawed premise that they share a common philosophical paradigm.”<sup>16</sup> Arguing that in the ontology of Genesis, “to bring something into existence (i.e. to create something) means to give it a function and role, not to give it physical properties,”<sup>17</sup> Walton contended that the conflict between Biblical faith and Darwinian science would disappear if we realized that Darwin offers a material ontology for our understanding of creation, while Genesis offers a functional ontology. Specifically, he has argued that God created everything to functionally serve man by placing all things under his rule and for his use. This parallel structure to the Sumerian Balbale complements his argument, by noting that functionally, all of creation is an act of love from God that calls on creation to return this love to the creator. This teaches us our functional role as creatures is to love the creator. Thus, his conclusion agrees with this paper: “the Genesis account is theologically distinct from ancient cosmologies and philosophically distinct (ontology) from modern cosmologies.”<sup>18</sup> When we see that the theme of God’s love that appears throughout the books of the Old Testament begins in Genesis 1, we come to realize that the great creator of the mysterious cosmos that we inhabit is also the great lover of all mankind.

The conclusion of this paper is that scripture's account of creation, as revealed by God to the priestly author, was not only adaptation of the primeval battle with chaos, but an adaptation of the familiar and common language of love poetry - God condescending, as it were, like a

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<sup>16</sup> Walton, 55.

<sup>17</sup> Walton, 57.

<sup>18</sup> Walton, 60.

lover, to speak to humankind in their limited capacity. Such a conclusion is within tradition of early Christian exegetes of scripture. Let us conclude with the words of Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Answer to Eunomius' Second Book*:

[S]ince God condescends to commune with His servants, we may consequently suppose that from the very beginning He enacted words appropriate to things. [...] We account for God's willingness to admit men to communion with Himself by His love towards mankind. [...] For as by Divine dispensation the sun, tempering the intensity of his full beams with the intervening air, pours down light as well as heat on those who receive his rays, being himself unapproachable by reason of the weakness of our nature, so the Divine power, after the manner of the illustration I have used, though exalted far above our nature and inaccessible to all approach, like a tender mother who joins in the inarticulate utterances of her babe, gives to our human nature what it is capable of receiving; and thus in the various manifestations of God to man He both adapts Himself to man and speaks in human language [...]

- Gregory of Nyssa