

5-1-1955

Natural Science with Reference to Genesis 1

A. C. Rehwaldt

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm>



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rehwaldt, A. C. (1955) "Natural Science with Reference to Genesis 1," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 26, Article 27.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol26/iss1/27>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Print Publications at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Concordia Theological Monthly by an authorized editor of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

Natural Science with Reference to Genesis I

By A. C. REHWALDT

A DISCUSSION of this problem has its pitfalls. There is danger of getting lost in a maze of conflicting opinions at the very start. The moment one turns to the Genesis account, the mind is flooded with associations coming from the outside. Besides, it calls for conscious effort to keep the mind from being swayed by one or the other of the many interpretations which have been presented. But if we seek a solution of some of the many problems which arise with respect to the relation of science and Genesis, we shall have to keep close to the text. If any solution is to be found, it must come from the Scriptures and not primarily from interpretation or from expert scientific opinion. Sasse seems to think that the solution of the problem of the theological interpretation of the opening chapter of Genesis has in some instances, if not in many, consisted in merely repeating what had already been said by others.

... the problem of the theological interpretation of the beginning of Genesis remains of the first order for the Lutheran Church of today, as it is a problem for Christian theology of all times. Every great theological problem is a challenge in every new age and cannot be answered by merely repeating earlier solutions. To challenge each age anew is the very essence of the Scriptures, the living and powerful Word of God. It challenges the age of atomic physics, and astrophysics, as well as the age of the old oriental and Aristotelian world view. Inasmuch as the Scriptures give to each of these ages the same answer, one answer is given which applies to all ages, all men, the learned and the unlearned, the wise and the ignorant.¹

To attempt to solve the problem before us, or any other problem for that matter, by merely repeating what has already been said, may be an evasion. It may be a device which affords one an escape from the struggle and the internal strife which necessarily come before real certitude is reached. Convictions do not come like Christmas packages, boxed and wrapped and tied with ribbons

and bows, which we can easily pick up and carry away and even hand on to others, ready-made for them. In his sermon "So Did Not I" (Neh. 5:15), Maclaren has something to say about this:

No man has any belief but what he wins for himself as the captive of his own spear and his own bow. If we are building on traditional opinion, we have really no foundation at all. Unless the word received from others has been verified by ourselves, and changed as it were, into a part of our own being, we may befool ourselves with creeds and professions to which we fancy that we adhere, but we have no belief whatsoever. You must learn to look with your own eyes and not through the spectacles of any human guides, authorities, or teachers upon the mystic, awful verities of this strange life, and upon the light that falls upon them from the far-off empyrean above.²

Goethe has Faust put it: "*Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast, erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.*"³

We dare not hope that the end result of a discussion such as this will be some formula which will blueprint the solution of the problem for all times. This would not be desirable. The Word will stand, not in the sense that it is static or that the world, advancing in its natural science, will outstride it, but in the sense that the Word, immovable and unshaken, has given its answer once and for all. The Word, while it stands, is dynamic and living and powerful and double-edged. Science advances and is subject to transformation and change. With each change it is challenged anew by the abiding Word. We, too, in our daily life, are confronted by the Word's persistent challenge with every new experience. This disturbs us. It calls for decisions. We must choose *either — or*. Tensions and struggles follow; they subside when the choice is made, at least for the time being. Similarly, every change in science confronts us anew with the problem before us. If it were not for the challenge of the Word, there would be no problem.

FIXING THE POINT OF VIEW

In view of the great transformation and advance of the natural sciences during the past decades, we should, perhaps, be satisfied to do no more than to confront ourselves again with the problems which arise in connection with the relationship between natural

science and the Scriptures. We have no thought of belittling anything that has been said by others on this matter. But what has been said in the past addresses itself to a world view that has, in many respects, been replaced by another. If the discussion of these problems is to be pertinent and understood, then we must consider them from the standpoint of the present world view. In reading earlier literature on the problem before us, we must carefully survey the scientific situation, the trend of thought, and the attitudes of that time to really understand the discussion. It would not be a discussion of the problem in a modern setting.

What has just been stated really pertains to the point of view from which we must consider our problem. But before proceeding to the problem itself, we shall have to add another thought or two about the perspective within which we shall place the problem. The perspective is important. It is paramount that we consider the Genesis account by itself, that we read and study it as though we were seeing it for the first time in our life. We dare not begin with any thought in mind of criticizing some interpretation, or of upholding it, or of refuting some scientific theory, or of assenting to it. We may do that later, but our first aim must be to get at the great truths of the sacred account by which our consciences are bound and on which our faith is established. These truths we shall follow unhesitatingly wherever they will take us. If any obstacles are encountered along the path where the truth is leading us, placed there by science, or reason, or some interpretation, we shall clear them away by disregarding them for the time being. The Scriptural truths stand so immensely above any knowledge which we obtain through our senses and processes of reason that we cannot think of them as being on the same level of authority.

HISTORICAL

Historically, the problem of natural science with reference to Genesis 1, is an ancient one. Some are inclined to think that it was first raised with the development of the modern theories of physical and historical geology. Sasse says the problem "... is as old as the Church and even older" and continues to say that the problem was first raised in the third century before Christ when Eratosthenes of Alexandria calculated the diameter of the earth.⁴ The problem was again revived a century later when Aristarchus

discovered the heliocentric system. This theory lay dormant for 1700 years because of the influence of Aristotle and his geocentric theory, an authority no one dared to question at that time. Nicholas of Oxerne († 1382) was unsuccessful in his attempt to revive the heliocentric theory, for Thomas had refuted it by appealing to Aristotle. The Jews of Alexandria were also confronted by the problem of harmonizing the Scriptural account of creation with the scientific views of the day after the Septuagint had appeared. An example of such a harmonization is Philo's book *Concerning Creation*. "The outstanding characteristic of this work is the attempt to demonstrate by apologetics that no conflict exists between the account of Genesis and those findings of science which Philo considered established as certain. The proof is developed by reading into the sacred text the world-picture of the time, only to be piously astonished to find it already there as divine revelation." Josephus concerned himself with the problem as the well-known quotation (*Antiquities*, Book I, Ch. I) indicates. The church fathers, too, coped with the problem of the hexaemeron, men like Ambrose, Augustine, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Chrysostom. We can understand that they did, for they were living in a world which had already, for some time, abandoned the view that the world is a circular plane covered by the heavenly dome with its sun and moon and stars. Sasse concludes his discussion of the history of the problem with a reference to Luther.

Even Luther did not fully escape the temptation to attempt to bring the Biblical creation account, as he presented it in his *Supputatio annorum mundi* and his lectures on Genesis, into agreement with the world picture which he had obtained through his philosophical and theological studies. When he declares: "Wir wollen Mose als dem besseren Doktor folgen, dem man sich mit grösserer Sicherheit anschliessen kann als den Philosophen, die ohne das Wort Gottes über unbekannte Sachen disputieren" (W. A. 42. 5. 20), he voices a sound principle, if only Moses were here not so closely associated with philosophy, an association in which he does not belong, especially not, according to the theology of Luther. At this point we have again arrived at apologetics and its grasp of Christianity when the statement is made that Plato comes closer to Scriptural truth than Aristotle, because he apparently gathered "sparks, as it were, from the ser-

mons of the fathers and the prophets" (W. A. 42. 4. 16). The possibility is not excluded that the editors {*Bearbeiter*} of the Genesis lectures are really speaking here. Nevertheless these are men of Luther's school, such as Veit Dietrich, who are here sacrificing to strange gods.⁵

Since the Reformation the literature on this problem has indeed become voluminous, as is evident when we examine the bibliography of Lange for the years 1830 to 1862.⁶

A little more than a hundred years ago Schleiermacher wrote to his young friend, the theologian Lücke: "Looking at the present state of natural science, which is becoming more and more an all-embracing cosmogony, what do you forebode in the future, not only for our theology, but for our evangelical Christianity? . . . I fear that we shall have to learn to give up many things which many are accustomed to think of as inseparably bound up with the essence of Christianity. I will not speak of the six days, but how long will the idea of the creation as it is usually believed hold out against the power of a cosmogony constituted from irrefragable scientific combinations? What is to happen then? As for me, I shall not see that time, but shall have gone to my rest; but you and the men of your age, what will you do?"⁷ Lücke, too, is gone, but we can answer Schleiermacher's pessimistic questions. We open our Bible. There it still is, majestic and true: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" Moreover, it is believed together with the other acts of God here set forth:

God created the heaven and the earth.

God said, Let there be light . . .

God divided the light from the darkness.

God said, Let there be a firmament.

God made the firmament and divided the waters . . .

God said, Let the waters . . . be gathered together . . . and let the dry land appear.

God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb . . . and the fruit tree . . .

God said, Let there be lights in the firmament.

God made two great lights . . . He made the stars . . .

God said, Let the waters bring forth . . . the moving creature . . . and fowl.

God created . . . whales and every living creature . . . and fowl.

God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature . . . cattle, and creeping thing, and beast . . .

God made the beast . . . and cattle . . . and everything that creepeth upon the earth. . . .

God said, Let us make man.

God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

The subject of every sentence is God. The predicate in each instance asserts a divine creative act, *created, said, divided, made*, until we reach the *rested*. All is as lucid as it ever can be for our weak understanding. Had we been permitted to stand at the Creator's side, to observe firsthand what He was doing as He created, we should know nothing at all, for we can know the great deeds of God only through divine revelation. All is put so clearly that the simplest Christian, even a child, can understand. These assertions bind the conscience, and our faith is grounded on them. They are given to us to be believed, not to satisfy our curiosity. Here we have ". . . the first rudiment of revelation addressed to the earliest and simplest consciousness of man, that, namely, which comes to him through his senses, the consciousness of the material world which lies in its grandeur around him."⁸ The purpose of this revelation is not to give man information about the material world but to reveal "God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," His power, wisdom, and loving-kindness. These assertions, which are the heart and core of the creation account, leave no room for dispute and argumentation. They need no interpretation.

Each assertion is reiterated and, in some instances, expanded elsewhere in the Scriptures. *God created the heaven and the earth* (Mark 13:19; John 1:3; Col. 1:16, 17; Neh. 9:6; Ps. 33:6; 89:11; 104:5; Is. 44:24). — *God said, Let there be light. God divided the light from the darkness.* (2 Cor. 4:6; Job 36:30, 32; 38:19; Ps. 74:16; 104:20; 139:11, 12; Is. 45:7.) — *God said, Let there be a firmament* (1 Chron. 16:26; Neh. 9:6; Job 9:8; 37:18;

Ps. 8:3; 19:1; 33:6; 104:2; Is. 40:22, 26). Job 26:13 refers not only to Gen. 1:6, but also to Gen. 1:2. Lewis calls attention to two passages in this connection: Job 26:8 ("He bindeth up the waters in His thick clouds; and the cloud is not rent under them"); Prov. 30:4 ("... who hath bound the waters in a garment?"). "The word cloud we would call literal language, with nothing metaphorical about it; but go to the old Saxon, and we find a root related to the Latin *cludo*, *clando*, Greek *kleid*, to shut, enclose, as well as to the derivative cloth—all representing the same image, and the old image of something that *shuts in*, *holds*, or *contains* like a bag."⁹ *God said, Let the waters be gathered together, and let the dry land appear* (Job 38:8-11; Ps. 90:2; 95:5; 104:5-9; Prov. 8:25).—If the first and last passages of this group are read as Luther translated them, or as they appear in the Revised Standard Version, the force of the original is brought out more clearly. Schlottmann says of Job 38:8-11: "There is . . . the idea of immense force . . . an almighty power opposing itself to the stubborn force of the young sea striving to extend itself towards the infinite."¹⁰—*God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herbs, and the fruit tree* (Matt. 6:29, 30; Luke 12:28; Job 38:27; Ps. 65: 9, 13; 104:14-16).—*God said, Let there be lights in the firmament. God made two great lights. He made the stars.* (Job 38: 31-33; Ps. 8:3; 74:16; 104:19; 136:7-9; 147:4; Is. 40:26.)—*God said, Let the waters bring forth the moving creatures and fowl. God created whales and every living creature and fowl. God made the beast and cattle and everything that creepeth upon the earth* (Matt. 6:26; 10:29; Job 12:7-10; 39; 40:15-24; 41; Ps. 8: 7, 8; 50:10, 11; 104:25-30).—*God said, Let Us make man. God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them* (Mark 10:6; Acts 17: 24-29; 1 Cor. 15:45; Col. 3:10; James 3:9; Deut. 4:32; 32:18; Job 10:8-18; Ps. 139:14-16; Is. 43:1; 44:24; 45:9-12; 54:5; Mal. 2:10).

LUTHER'S VIEW

Thus we are instructed concerning Creation not only in Genesis but throughout the Scriptures. The ancient creeds gather *these central assertions of Genesis* together in a sentence or two. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth."

"I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible." Luther, in his introduction to his exposition of the first chapter of Genesis, has this to say: "It is apparent that God has reserved the majesty of His wisdom and a proper understanding of this chapter for Himself, but in general He lets us know that the world had a beginning and was created out of nothing. Such knowledge the text sets forth clearly. But with respect to details there is much of which one cannot at all be certain and about which countless questions are raised now and then."¹¹ If we pursue Luther beyond the introduction, he seems to be inconsistent, for he does concern himself with things of which he had said, "*Dess man gar nicht gewiss sein kann.*" He speculates at times. He does not hesitate to embody folk lore in his discussion, when, for instance, he speaks of the providence of God, which provides for the swallows whether they live in trees or hibernate under water in the sea.¹² Luther is *not inconsistent*. In his exposition of Gen. 1:1 he writes: "As we stated before, there is no one whose exposition we could accept and follow; in these matters, therefore, we shall leave everyone to his own judgment and what he thinks best, and state *what our opinion is on these things* (Nun habe ich aber zuvor gesagt, dass wir keinen haben, dem wir in dieser Auslegung nachgehen und folgen könnten; *darum wollen wir einem jeden sein Judicium und Gutdünken hierin lassen, und sagen was davon unsere Meinung sei*)."¹³ Italics are ours. Unless we wholly misunderstand Luther, he has placed two labels. The one he has placed on those assertions of Genesis which are clear and direct and permit no misunderstanding and which are stated elsewhere in Scriptures. These bind our consciences and are articles of faith. The other label Luther places on assertions which are *dark*. These are not dark in themselves, but from our point of view. Our conceptual and perceptual ability is here outmatched by the majestic wisdom of God. We might as well confess it. The vast literature of the past ought to convince us of the futility of attempting to explain all the details of the creation account in a definitive manner. If the Holy Spirit is silent and gives no exegesis of a dark word or passage, then we are overreaching ourselves if we attempt to supply it. But, in spite of all this, if we still feel that we must explain, then

let us do as Luther does, who virtually says: "Here comes Luther with his opinion. Take it, or leave it!" We dare never give our opinions the guise of the Word of God. That would make us usurpers. Much of the ridicule which is directed toward the Bible is evoked by some personal opinion which is stated so emphatically as to give the impression that it is backed up by Scriptural authority. Those who delight in their derision of the Bible do not bother to inquire whether the volley of ridicule was provoked by the Word of Scripture itself or by some well-meant statement of interpretation.

DIVERGENT OPINIONS

The most challenging word in the Genesis account is the Hebrew word *yom*, day. The moment it is mentioned, we take sides. The one side holds out for a twenty-four hour day of creation; the other insists that the days were longer intervals, periods, even eons. Skirmish after skirmish results in nothing decisive.

The first group takes the following position: *Yom* means day, an ordinary day, a solar day of twenty-four hours. That the day of Genesis 1 is of such duration is indicated by the words "And the evening and the morning. . . ." This mention of evening and morning settles the matter. Furthermore this is supported by the Sabbatical institution (Ex. 20:11). The others have this to say, among other things: *Yom* means day, but it is also used to denote weeks, years, and long stretches of time; here it is used to indicate periods of time. The first three days cannot be twenty-four hours long. How can there be a solar day without a sun? The days are all of the same duration as is indicated by the reiteration of the declaration: "And the evening and the morning were the . . . day." This labels these days as being extraordinary ones. The word *day* is used to indicate the cyclic feature of creation. The idea *day* has among its elementary constituent thoughts that it is cyclical or periodical in nature, and that it has duration in time. The periodical nature of day is catholic and immutable. Duration is relative and variable. Above the Arctic Circle, days are six months long. The root from which the Hebrew *ereb*, evening, is derived has the primary meaning of *entering in*, without connotation of duration. *Boker*, morning, is derived from the root which has the

idea of *separating, cleaving* (dawn, separation of object from object). To quote Ex. 20:11 in support of the twenty-four-hour interpretation is begging the question. We could go on, but this shall be enough.

As we listen to the arguments of both sides, we are perhaps momentarily swayed first to the one side and then to the other. This happens because neither side can quote sound Scriptural support for its view. If an appeal is made to Scripture, apparent support is eked out by employing deduction and inference. Such procedure carries no conviction. It lacks the ring of authority and remains just what it is, reasoning, deduction, inference. Each side has among its arguments also an element or two which cannot be denied and ignored. The one insists that *yom* means day. The authorities support them in this insistence. "The meaning of the Hebrew word *yom*, used in the creation account, is the same as that of the English word *day*. *Yom* accordingly denotes day in contrast to night, a calendar day, time, a year, and in a pregnant sense, also a time of judgment or retribution. But there is no passage where the word *day* denotes an eon or even a long period. The passages in which the word is supposed to have this last meaning do not confirm the claim upon inspection."¹⁴ There is absolutely no way of getting around the fact that *yom* means day. The other side, too, makes an assertion with considerable conviction: "How can there be a twenty-four-hour day without the sun?" The sacred text calls the creation intervals, whatever their duration may have been, *days*, and at the same time states that the regulator of days as we ordinarily understand it was not yet in existence, at least not for the first three days. No matter how much we may argue in favor of the one side or the other, we are blocked. Both times we are blocked by the text itself: on the one hand by *yom*, and on the other by the fact that the sun was not in existence. Nor can we solve the problem, at least in part, by assuming that the first three days varied in duration from the last. "... It must be kept in mind that at the end of each of the six creation days, the same limiting clause reappears, apparently indicating that there was no difference between the days in the early part of the account and those in the later. Uniformly there appears the statement: *And evening was and morning was day so-and-so.*"¹⁵ No matter how long and how

diligently we search the Scriptures, ready to pounce upon any hint which may have been obscured by translation, but which may justify our taking a stand one way or the other, we shall find none. At least, that is our experience.

THE SOLUTION

What, then, are we to do in the face of this problem? There is only one thing we *can* do — humble ourselves before the majestic wisdom of God. Perhaps in attempting to force the text to reveal more than it tells, we are acting like a child that taps the hand of the master craftsman and says, "What are you doing?" A child may do this to the father or a friend, but we dare not do this to God. "None can stay His hand or say to Him, What doest Thou?" (Dan. 4:34.) Paul warns us against being self-appointed, privy councilors to the Lord (Rom. 11:34). The text says *yom*. The text makes it impossible for us to say anything about duration. We shall have to say with Genesis, the creation interval was a day; and as far as duration is concerned, we shall have to insist that the Scriptures say nothing about it. We certainly may have our own personal opinion on duration. We may express it if we care to, but we are conscience bound never to give the impression that we are stating a Scriptural truth when we are voicing a mere opinion. An opinion must be so labeled, and in large print. The problem of duration does not stem from the Scriptures but from a desire to refute natural science. It is really trivial and is remote from the exalted purpose of the Genesis account.

... Creation is referred to not only in the first chapter of Genesis, but also in other parts of the Old Testament, the creation Psalm, the Book of Job, the Prophets, particularly when they speak of the redemption of the creature and of a new creation. The New Testament extends the doctrine of the Old, in that it stresses, above all, the participation of the Logos in Creation and thus leads us to understand this work as the work of the Triune God. This is already indicated in the creation account when the Word of God and the *Creator Spiritus* have such a prominent participation. If the article of creation is inseparable from the Triune God, then it is clear why it is a pure article of faith. The First Article can never be properly understood and explained without the Second and the Third, not even in the instruction of children;

for how is it possible for a crippled child to confess with Luther's explanation, "This is most certainly true," unless it be in view of Him who opened the eyes of the blind and bade the lame to walk! The question which arises is this: What is essentially the doctrinal content of the creation account? It would evidently instruct us concerning that which God did, the Triune God, when He created the world. Its chief purpose is not to give us a cosmology, as do so many Jewish apocalypses which would give instruction concerning the structure of the world. The chief purpose of the Scriptural account is theological. God created, God said, God made, God blessed, God saw all that He had made, God rested on the seventh day. All the deeds and works of God are a matter of faith. The "how" lies beyond all human abilities of perception and understanding. The incarnation of the Word, the reconciliation, the resurrection and ascension of Christ, His sitting at the right hand of the Father, His coming from thence, the presence of His body, all, all lie beyond understanding as do also the work and the works of creation. No human being can possibly visualize for himself a creation out of nothing through the Word—not even the physicists who now speak of a sudden beginning of the world—just so can no human imagination visualize the individual works of creation which Genesis presents. How can one speak of a twenty-four-hour day without a sun? Who can say what is meant when it says, "God rested from His works" on the seventh day? It certainly cannot mean that God left the created world to itself, whether this be a longer or a shorter interval. According to Luther's deep understanding, the Creation is a *creatio continua*: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures," and so it is inseparably joined to the miracle of preservation (John 5:17). We cannot picture this to ourselves, yet we believe that these words are true and that every sentence in the creation account indicates something which really happened. It is actually true that man did not develop from the animal world, but stepped into existence through a miraculous creative act of God, even though we cannot visualize it. It is a reality that one human pair stood at the beginning and that the first Adam was as much a reality as the Second, even though it be impossible for us, who live on this side of the Fall, to visualize it. Just as the last things of which the Bible speaks pass all of our conceptual capacities, so they are surpassed also by the first of which the Bible speaks. Just as the Bible cannot help using picturesque language

when, in the Apocalypse of St. John, it speaks of the last things; e.g., the deeply pathetic sentence which speaks of one of the last things which God does: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Rev. 21:4), just so we must assume that many a statement concerning the first things is also clothed in picturesque language. Certainly no one will deny this fact with respect to Gen. 2:7. This is not a denial of the reality of the things we are told there. Nor dare we forget that the Genesis account makes no claim for completeness. . . .¹⁶

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

What about natural science with reference to Genesis? The solution is not far off now, but there are other matters which must be cleared up before we can cope with the final problem. First of all, the reference frame is the Bible and not natural science. It makes a tremendous difference just how we state it: natural science with reference to the Scriptures or the Scriptures with reference to natural science. Next, one dare not say that science, in some particular instance, supports a statement of the Bible. Sanden does this in his book, *Does Science Support the Scriptures?*¹⁷ and so does Rimmer in his books, to mention only two. Really, we had better try to set the world on an up-ended straw than undertake to give the Bible greater credence with the help of science. The Bible needs no support from science. To say that it does borders on blasphemy. Either the Bible *is* the Word of God, or it *is not*. If it is not, then we agree that a scientific support would be welcome. But as it is, the Bible needs no props, not even scientific props.

There are many other similar matters which belong here, but we shall mention only one more. Some, also well-meaning Christians, maintain at times that the world view of the Bible is geocentric. We shall gladly agree that it is anthropocentric, rightly understood, but not that it is geocentric. We shall even concede that it seems to be geocentric. We have touched this problem before.¹⁸ Scripture speaks a language which is universally understood when any reference is made to nature. It speaks of natural things as they appear to the senses, and in speaking of them it makes no attempt to explain the natural process involved. To be sure, there is usually a theological significance intimately associated with the reference to some natural phenomenon. That is merely incidental

at this point of our discussion. The language of Scriptures is based on the first picture, the first impression, received by the observer. This language, call it the language of appearances, phenomenal or phenomenational language, speaks of nature as it appears from the perspective center of the observer, no matter which of the sensory organs he employs as he makes his observation. This perspective center is the individual. He is somewhere on earth, unless by means of an abstraction, or some other mental effort, he takes his position elsewhere. We can think, if we care to, that the grindstone on which we are sharpening our ax is standing still and that the ax, and we, and the whole world are revolving around the stone; and if it please us, we can take the rest of the universe with us. So the Bible places the reader at the perspective center which is naturally and easily taken, and most obvious. The terms geocentric, heliocentric, relativity, all are associated with scientific theories. To say that the point of view of the Bible is geocentric implies that the Bible takes *some* scientific view of the world, which it does not. Following the same reasoning, we should be justified in saying that The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod is committed to the geocentric theory because the geocentric point of view is taken by the editors of the calendar which appears in the *Lutheran Annual*. We could say the same thing of the Naval Observatory at Washington which publishes the *Nautical Almanac*, which would be valueless for the navigator unless the stars and planets were observed from the earth.

We shall now consider the final problem — the relation of natural science and the Bible. We do so realizing that, without giving any previous explanation, we made the bare statement that the Bible is not committed to any scientific theory. Therefore something ought to be said about the denial of the Creator, first cause, cause and effect, etc., but we shall refrain from treating these topics for the present, in the hope that they may be considered some other time.

BIBLE AND SCIENCE PARALLELS

We often hear it said that there is no conflict between science and the Bible. This is true only if by *science* we mean the true science. The term *science* is, to some extent, undergoing a transformation. Unless we completely misunderstand, the famous Ger-

man physicist Heisenberg implies, in a recent address delivered at München, that *science*, at least in some instances, even though it involves a mathematical formulation of a law of nature, does not concern itself with some objective reality (elementary particles), but with our knowledge of them.¹⁹ Perhaps, then, we had better say there is no conflict between nature as such and the Bible. Both are the revelation of God. If there is a conflict, the exegesis of the theologian or the explanation of the natural scientist is at fault. The fact is that both have contributed to the apparent discord between the Scriptures and nature. Sasse's discussion of this follows.

At this point the question will be asked: "Is there, then, no conflict between theology and science?" The answer must be "No." There can be no conflict if both theology and science operate in their own sphere. Both the theological and the scientific contemplation of the world run side by side like the tracks of two parallel railroads. The trains run back and forth without coming in contact with each other. A collision is possible only if there has been a derailment. That has happened in the past and is likely to happen again in the future. The theologian is always tempted to want to know more than he knows and to insist upon or to develop a Christian conception of the cosmos and a Christian geology and paleontology on the basis of the Scriptures. The scientists cannot deny their descent from medieval Scholasticism in which philosophy and theology were inseparably joined in a system. So they are constantly tempted to invade the area of theology and to declare, for instance, that miracles are impossible. No real scientist will do this, for the very reason that this concept does not occur in his science. Even the Catholic scientist who is called upon to render an opinion in a process of canonization, or who is asked to say something with respect to some miraculous healing at Lourdes, will be cautious not to use the word "miracle," which has no place in his science. The Catholic theologians in this case are the ones who use and misuse the concept miracle. With respect to the miracles of the Holy Scriptures, it might be stated that the church has no right, nor is it possible for her to spare her members or mankind the problem (*Ärgerniss*) which these miracles present to our reason. But on the other hand, nor has the church the right to give unnecessary offense by insisting upon a world view which apparently is based on the Word of God but actually is not found in the Bible. Great damage has been

done by both sides when they overstepped the boundary line. If there is a church which ought to be free from this trespass, it is the church of the Lutheran Reformation, which has always, as a matter of principle, kept theology and philosophy apart. For his person a philosopher can be a Christian, and a Christian can be a philosopher by profession. But faith which comes from the Word, and philosophy, which is an activity of reason, must forever remain apart, simply because reason cannot perceive or validate the truths of faith and the Word of God does not give the answers to the questions put by philosophy. . . . The conflict between *lumen naturae* and *lumen gratiae*, under which we Christians have to live in this world, will be resolved in the *lumen gloriae* (Luther). The wonders of God which we know through faith in Him are always closed to fallen reason. This does not mean that reason is not to be used with respect to everything which belongs to its sphere, however much it has been beclouded by the Fall and is a reason which is blind in things which pertain to God. "*Lumen naturae*" and "*lumen gratiae*" and "*lumen gloriae*" will be one only in the eternal world when the mind of man has been set free from sin and its effects and faith has become sight.²⁰

Whenever honest and sincere doubt, reaching around in all directions for the solid truth on which to stand, comes face to face with a controversy between the Bible and science, the creation account is involved in most cases. The unbeliever who delights to discredit the Bible in the eyes of the world will most likely direct his attack against the creation account. The result of this has been that both the theologian and the scientist have gone all out to establish concord between science and interpretation of the Scriptures. They have called all their acumen and learning into action to clear away every contradiction and to establish harmony. Among such scientists we would mention particularly Guyot and Hugh Miller.

The strange thing is, as Kurtz²¹ pointed out a hundred years ago, that just here (creation account), where contradictions stand out most clearly and where one might expect them to be most frequent, they are an impossibility if the creation account is correctly understood. Contradictions are impossible here for the simple reason that the Bible does not *reveal* any knowledge which can be discovered and disclosed by natural science. And, obversely, it

is true that knowledge for which science can search, and which it can establish, if found, does not lie within the domain of revelation. The knowledge which science and the Bible impart lies in two different spheres. So science and the Bible cannot be *supplementary* in their relation to each other but are parallel. The one presents revealed knowledge, the other acquired knowledge. Each moves in its own sphere without encroaching upon the other. They stand side by side—the grand, majestic, and awful Genesis account and human science. We need them both. Thus we see that science and the Bible *complement* each other. They do not contradict each other provided both are rightly understood. *This is the relation in which natural science stands to the Bible*, as we see it. Interesting is that Kurtz soon forgot all about the important truth he had formulated and proceeded to develop his idea of a Biblical cosmology, for the subtitle to his volume reads: *Ein Beitrag zur biblischen Kosmologie* (A Contribution Toward a Biblical Cosmology).

FREEDOM UNDER THE WORD

Within the framework of the Bible, a Christian may move freely in any of the fields of science, geology, paleontology, biology, and the physical sciences, without any fear and misgivings, or any limitations also with respect to time. The Master has also stepped up to each one of us whose lifework lies somewhere in the field of sciences. We, too, have felt the pressure of His hand as He laid it on our shoulder, fixed His eyes upon us, and said, "Follow Me." Thus, we, too, have been honored, as He sooner or later honors every man who has heard the Gospel. And if through the power of the Spirit, we have surrendered ourselves to Him, body and soul, and are ready literally to do what He asks us to do, to follow Him, where will He take us? The farmer goes back to his plough. The housewife goes back to her kitchen drudgery. The teacher goes back to the classroom, the scientist to his strata or his fossils or his microscope. The Lord takes each one back to where his interests and his duties lie. There we are to serve Him.

If this freedom just mentioned is really ours under the Word of God, then we have also an obligation to discharge in this respect. We must fearlessly go where the Word takes us. Then it is up to us to testify to the truth of such freedom and to proclaim it when-

ever the occasion arises. To keep silence will not do. Our silence may lead to a misunderstanding of the Bible, may give the impression that the authority of the Word imposes limitations and restrictions where none are laid down at all. Oh, we know that this whole problem is really subordinate and not major. We know also that the falling away began here for many an inexperienced Christian young man and woman. If for no other reason, then for their sake we ought to speak the truth. Although we know that Christ is speaking on the highest level, yet we feel that also at the lower level, on which we have been moving, His words apply: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32).

Milwaukee, Wis.

NOTES

1. Hermann Sasse, "Zum Verständniss des Sechstageswerks," *Lutherische Blätter*, VI: 34 (Jan., Feb., 1954), 16—28. Translation mine.
2. Alexander Maclaren, D. D., *Sermons Preached in Manchester*, Third Series (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1902), p. 97.
3. Latham in *Everyman's Library* translates this: "What from thy sires thou hast, make thine indeed, ere that amongst thy goods thou number" (pp. 682, 683).
4. Hermann Sasse, loc. cit.
5. Ibid.
6. John P. Lange, D. D., "Introduction to Genesis," Schaff-Lange, *Genesis* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1872), pp. 116, 117.
7. Fr. H. Reusch, *Nature and the Bible*, Transl. from 4th ed. by Kathleen Lyttelton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1886), I, 69.
8. Thomas D. Bernard, M. A., *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, Reprinted from the plates procured from the American Tract Society, New York City (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 37.
9. Tayler Lewis, *The Six Days of Creation* (Schenectady: G. Y. van Debogert, 1855), pp. 119, 120.
10. Tayler Lewis, *Nature and the Scriptures*, The Vedder Lectures, 1875 (New York: Board of Publication of the R. C. A., 1875), p. 173.
11. *Martin Luther's Sämmtliche Schriften*, (St. Louis, Mo.: Luth. Concordia-Verlag, 1880), I, 4, 5.
12. Ibid., p. 62.
13. Ibid., p. 8.
14. George V. Schick, "An Exegetical Study of Some Problems in the Biblical Creation Account," an unpublished paper presented to the Conference of Professors of Science of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, Fort Wayne, Ind., 1954.
15. Ibid.

16. Sasse, loc. cit.
17. O. E. Sanden, *Does Science Support the Scriptures?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1951.)
18. CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XXI (Sept., 1950), 674—684.
19. W. Heisenberg, Göttingen, "Das Naturbild in der heutigen Physik," *Universitas*, IX (November 1954).
20. Sasse, loc. cit.
21. Johann H. Kurtz, *Bibel und Astronomie*, Zweite Auflage, (Berlin: Justus Albert Wohlgemuth, 1849), p. 6.

[Editorial Note

As is evident from the article as a whole as well as from previous contributions to this journal (Sept., 1950, p. 674 ff.; May, 1953, p. 330 ff.; June, 1954, p. 433 ff.), the author does not want his presentation to be interpreted as in any way vitiating or limiting the inspiration of the words of Scripture. To the contrary, he is applying one of the cardinal principles of such a view of Scripture: the inspired words must be interpreted by these same words. His concern is therefore the exegetical question: What is the divinely intended sense of the word *yom* and how does Scripture itself define it? On this point of interpretation there has been and still is a difference of opinion also among those who uphold the full authority of the inspired words of Scripture.—Nor does the publication of this article endorse the validity or cogency of the argumentation in all its points.—It as well as the author's previous articles could serve as a useful basis for renewed study of a perennial problem.]