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# The Creation Account of Genesis

## Guidelines for an Interpretation

WALTER R. ROEHRS

### INTRODUCTION

This paper addresses itself to the problem of how to read correctly what two books have to say on the same subject matter.

In both of them God speaks to us of what He has done. Since He does not contradict Himself, what He says in one book must be found to be in accord with what He proclaims in the other.

The two books of God are Holy Scripture and the book of nature. Both have something to say to us about the topic of creation.

Our task is to determine how to read both in harmony with each other so that what each says in its own way contributes to our understanding of God's creative work.

In our discussion, therefore, we are not dealing with people who do not acknowledge God as the author of one or the other book or of both of them: the unbeliever, the agnostic, the atheist, the materialist.

The particular problem to which we are addressing ourselves arises among people who not only accept a personal God but believe without reservation that God has

revealed Himself.<sup>1</sup> Their only hope for time and eternity rests in a Redeemer God who is also the Creator God.

There is, however, among people with these firm convictions a difference of opinion on what both books actually have to say about creation. In full accord with the assumption that both books are in perfect harmony in what they say in their own way on this subject, they nevertheless disagree on the way in which some aspects of both are to be understood and interpreted if the testimony of both books is to agree.

Some have read widely and intensively, that is, professionally, in the book of creation. Some have delved deeply into the mystery of both revelations. I am not qualified to render a verdict as to whether their exegesis of the text of natural phenomena is valid. I do not suppose that there are many who will claim competence as interpreters of both. But as professional interpreters of Scripture we ought to look intelligently and devoutly into the teachings of Scripture and to examine them

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 11:3: By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear. "The Biblical doctrine of creation is based on divine revelation and understood only from the standpoint of faith . . . The work of creation, no less than the mystery of redemption, is hidden from man and can be perceived only by faith." *The New Bible Dictionary* (London: The Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962), p. 269.

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ever anew to see what they do say about creation and what they do not say.

The problem as just outlined no doubt has one of its main foci in the opening chapters of Scripture. The basic question is whether this account is intended to have what has been called a literal meaning, that is, whether the words and terms here used are intended to have a direct correlation and congruence with the phenomena and processes they describe, or whether some words are here put together in such a way that they have a literal meaning in the form and framework of metaphorical or anthropomorphic language.

In approaching this problem we will also take for granted that we are dealing with people who accept a few other axioms of Biblical interpretation. First among these is the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. In our specific question, then, we can expect that what Scripture says about creation in one place and in one way must be so understood as to be in agreement with what it says in other places and in other ways. It is therefore valid procedure to quote Scripture to throw light on Scripture.

Another axiom deals with the peculiar purpose of each of the two books of revelation. Scripture is to be read, says St. Paul to Timothy, primarily because it is "able to instruct [us] for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). No one will or can get this wisdom by reading the book of nature. At the same time what Scripture, in pursuing its chief function, says about man, the object of God's redemption, about his origin and that of his environment, the world in which he lives, is no less true. In fact, what Scripture says about man, his origin, and his world is, as

we shall see, so inextricably intertwined and interlocked with its teaching of salvation that we blur its redemptive message or even undermine it if any attempt is made to distinguish between the reliability of what it says about God as man's Creator and about the God who is the Redeemer of His creation.

Perhaps we should also mention another obvious fact which, however, has important implications. God speaks clearly enough in both books of revelation to achieve His purpose. People who fail to respond to what God says in nature and through the conscience with which He has created them are without excuse and incur God's wrath, because He made man as he is and has endowed him as he is. In dealing with such as have only this revelation, God will act both in justice and in mercy. The point we wish to make here is that God tells us more fully and more clearly in Scripture than in the book of nature what He wants us to know about Himself and us, His creatures.

It is also true that both are given in a way that requires man's intellectual capacities—a gift of the Creator—to play a part in man's response and responsibility. But in our effort to read what God has written in the book of nature, we are by far more dependent on inferences and deductions made by our reasoning power. Because of the fallibility of the observations of our senses and of the limited validity of the conclusions we draw from them, what we read in the book of nature dare never contradict what God has said more clearly, more immediately, and in many ways in Scripture. The remark that the Bible is no textbook of science is true if we want to imply thereby that its main



purpose is to make us wise to salvation. But let no science book persuade us to deny anything that the Bible teaches about what God considered necessary for us to know also about creation as an aid in achieving His main purpose of making us wise unto salvation.

Having defined and established the issues under consideration and having agreed on a framework of axioms within which by common consent we can operate in seeking an answer to the question, we shall proceed as follows:

First we want to see the teaching of creation in the perspective of Scripture as a whole.

Then we shall note the various ways and forms of language which Scripture employs to tell us about creation.

Finally, we shall turn to Genesis 1 and 2 more directly and draw some conclusions regarding what these chapters teach on the basis of what we learn from Scripture as a whole.

# I

## FOR WHAT PURPOSE AND IN WHAT CONNECTION DOES SCRIPTURE TEACH WHAT IT DOES ABOUT CREATION?

One of the rules of interpretation that is generally accepted as valid for the purpose of understanding Scripture, or any literature for that matter, requires that every passage or part be examined in its context. Since this is merely a corollary of the axiom that Scripture must interpret Scripture, we did not mention it previously. If the teaching of Scripture is a consistent whole in its prime purpose of making man wise unto salvation, then every part of it must fall into place to serve that end, as the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle

have meaning only when they are fitted together to form a picture.

The teachings of Scripture on creation certainly are no exception to this rule. The passages that deal directly or indirectly with this subject cannot be treated atomistically, that is, out of context, but must be seen as contributing their share to the purpose and intent, that is, to the meaning, of Biblical revelation as such.

In our endeavor to see the teaching of Scripture on creation in this perspective, we will initially omit the opening chapters of Genesis and the question of their larger context and turn to the rest of Scripture. When we find references to creation, we ask: In what kind of context do they occur? What do they teach in their setting? What do they contribute to the purpose of Scripture to make man wise unto salvation?

We shall summarize the salient points in a number of theses and then add some passages to support them. Space permits the quotation of only a few pertinent passages. In each case more could be added.

## *Thesis A*

First we note that in Scripture the fact of creation is stated as an unargued axiom, just as the existence of God is not proved but taken for granted. Only the fool says: "There is no God." There is no ontological or philosophical reasoning to support the bare statement that heaven and earth as well as man are the work of God's hands.

*Is. 42:5:* Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it:



*Ps. 146:5, 6:* Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever;

*2 Kings 19:15:* And Hezekiah prayed before the Lord and said: "O Lord the God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth.

*1 Chron. 16:26:* For all the gods of the peoples are idols; but the Lord made the heavens.

*Neb. 9:6:* Thou art the Lord, Thou alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and Thou preservest all of them; and the host of heaven worships Thee.

*Ps. 24:1, 2:* The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world, and those who dwell therein; for He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

*Ps. 33:6:* By the Word of the Lord the heavens were made; and all their host by the breath of His mouth.

*Ps. 74:16:* Thine is the day, Thine also the night; Thou hast established the luminaries and the sun.

Cf. also *Ps. 102:25; Prov. 3:19; 22:2; 1 Sam. 2:8; Job 12:7-10; Jer. 10:12; 32:17; Zech. 12:1.*

### *Thesis B*

As some of these passages already indicate, this fact of creation is never presented merely as an isolated or detached truth that is developed for its own sake. When we look at them more closely, we shall see that the fact of creation always

appears as an axiomatic basis from which something is to be deduced or by which something is to be established. From creation man is to know not so much how he came to be, but, more important, what his relationship to his Creator should be particularly in view of the Creator's purpose to be fallen man's Redeemer in his separation from his Creator. The correlation is: because God created, therefore . . . man is reminded of creation in order to draw a response from him.

The first response is that of trust.

1. Because God is the Creator, He has the power to save His fallen creature. Man can trust His Redeemer in his fatal separation from God because the Redeemer is the almighty, omnipresent, omniscient Creator.

*Ps. 124:8:* Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

*Ps. 121:2:* My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

*Ps. 146:5, 6:* Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever;

*Is. 37:16, 20:* O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, who art enthroned above the cherubim, Thou art the God, Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth . . . So now, O Lord our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that Thou alone art the Lord.

*Is. 45:17, 18:* But Israel is saved by the Lord with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity. For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens (He is God!), who formed the earth and made it (He estab-



lished it; He did not create it a chaos, He formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the Lord, and there is no other."

*Is. 48:12, 13:* Hearken to Me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the First, and I am the Last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call unto them, they stand forth together.

*Jer. 51:14, 15:* The Lord of hosts has sworn by Himself; Surely I will fill you with men, as many as locusts, and they shall raise the shout of victory over you. It is He who made the earth by His power, who established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding stretched out the heavens.

Cf. also: *Ps. 89:8, 9, 11, 15-18; 90:2, 14; Is. 42:5, 6; 43:1; 50:2, 3; 51:9-13; Jer. 31:31, 35, 36; 32:17, 20, 21, 23; Zech. 12:1, 2.*

2. Scripture reminds man of the Creator in order to evoke trust in his Redeemer. But even more general and emphatic are the references in Scripture to the Creator for the purpose of eliciting the response of praise for His creation and redemption. Because God is the Creator, therefore praise Him! We are not surprised about this because many of the references to creation are found in poetic and hymnic form such as we have particularly in the Book of Psalms.

*Ps. 148:5:* Let them praise the name of the Lord! for He commanded, and they were created.

*Ps. 95:3-6:* For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; for His hands formed the dry land. O come, let

us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

*Ps. 136:1, 4-9:* O give thanks to the Lord . . . to Him who alone does great wonders, for His steadfast love endures forever; to Him who by understanding made the heavens, for His steadfast love endures forever; to Him who spread out the earth upon the waters, for His steadfast love endures forever; to Him who made the great lights, for His steadfast love endures forever; the sun to rule over the day, for His steadfast love endures forever; the moon and stars to rule over the night, for His steadfast love endures forever;

*Ps. 146:5, 6:* Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;

a. Because He is the Creator, He alone should be glorified. How absurdly wicked it is to worship anyone or anything besides Him and thus to raise the creature to the level of the Creator. In the Old Testament, and most trenchantly in the second part of Isaiah, such idolatry is scored with biting sarcasm as nonsense: how stupid of man to venerate and give homage to what his hands or imagination fabricated instead of Him from whom man received his hands and his mind.

*Is. 40:18, 19, 21, 22, 26:* To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with Him? The idol! a workman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts for it silver chains. . . . Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is He who sits above the circle of the earth,



and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; . . . Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power, not one is missing.

*Is. 48:3, 5, 7, 12, 13:* The former things I declared of old, they went forth from My mouth and I made them known; then suddenly I did them, and they came to pass. . . . I declared them to you from of old, before they came to pass I announced them to you, lest you should say, "My idol did them, my graven image and my molten image commanded them." . . . They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them. . . . "Hearken to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called! I am He, I am the First, and I am the Last. My hand laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens;

*Is. 44:9, 24:* All who make idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit; their witnesses neither see nor know, that they may be put to shame. . . . Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: "I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone, who spread out the earth — Who was with me?

Cf. also *Is. 51:12, 13; 45:5-7; Jer. 10:10-13; 14:22; Hos. 8:5, 14; Is. 17:7, 8; Ps. 135:5, 6, 15-18.*

b. God desires to be praised and glorified by man because He alone is worthy of such praise and glory as the Creator of man. Furthermore, because of the transcendent power and unfathomable wisdom of the Creator, man should not cease praising and glorifying Him, although the clay does not understand the way in which the Potter fashioned him or deals with him.

*Is. 40:27, 28:* Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God"? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, His understanding is unsearchable.

*Is. 45:9, 10:* Woe to him who strives with his Maker, as earthen vessel with the potter! Does the clay say to him who fashions it, "What are you making?" or "Your work has no handles"? Woe to him who says to a father, "What are you begetting?" or to a woman, "With what are you in travail?"

*Prov. 30:4, 5:* Who has ascended to heaven and come down? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped up the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name, and what is His Son's name? Surely you know! Every Word of God proves true; He is a Shield to those who take refuge in Him.

Cf. also *Is. 55:8, 9; Eccl. 3:11; 11:5; 12:1; Ps. 100:1-3.*

Most of the passages that we have cited refer to creation more or less briefly. There are, however, some sections of the Old Testament besides Gen. 1 and 2 that deal with this topic at greater length and in a more sustained development of its significance. They are particularly Ps. 104, Job 38 and 39, and Prov. 8.

We shall examine them briefly to determine what they contribute to our understanding of the purpose of the Scriptural teaching regarding creation.

### 1. Psalm 104

The very first verse of this psalm tells us why the psalmist is speaking of crea-



tion: "Bless the Lord, O my soul! O Lord my God, Thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty." The writer does not intend to give us a cosmology or an outline of the structure and function of the universe. He is merely responding to the purpose which God had in creating man, as He expressed it in Is. 43:21: "The people whom I formed for Myself that they might declare My praise." In his commentary on the Psalms, Weiser puts it thus: "The poet . . . has painted . . . this picture which . . . serves the representation of one religious idea only: the idea that God has created that celestial world *for His own sake* so that it might serve His will, bear witness to His power and wisdom, and reveal His glory; a thought which states for all ages to come the ultimate meaning of all study of nature."<sup>2</sup> Terrien gives as the topic of the psalm: "The Lord of the Seven Wonders." These wonders are: "(1) the sky (vv. 2-4); (2) the earth (vv. 5-9); (3) water (vv. 10-13); (4) vegetation (vv. 14-18); (5) the moon and the sun (vv. 19-23); (6) the sea (vv. 24-26); (7) the gift of life (vv. 27-30)."<sup>3</sup> Because God is such a Lord of glory, therefore "I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being." (v. 33)

In other words, the function of this psalm serves the same purpose that we stated above, particularly in Thesis B, 2.

The same holds true of other "hymns of

nature" in the Psalter which contain longer or shorter meditations on creation as the work of God's hands, such as: 8, 19, 24, 33, 65, 74, 89, 102, 135, 146.

## 2. Job 38—41

These chapters, which are some of the most sublime sections in the Old Testament, are a sustained and poetic effusion of the thought which we mentioned in Thesis B, 2, b: because of the transcendent power and unsearchable wisdom that God displayed in creation and still manifests in the preservation of His creation, man should not cease praising and glorifying Him even when man does not understand God's dealings with him.

As the result of severe trials, Job had come to the verge of accusing God of being either unjust or of having lost control over his destiny. His wife and his friends had only further befuddled his groping faith. Elihu had some helpful suggestions. But Job's wavering and shaken confidence in God is restored when "the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind." (38:1)

What was God's answer? It did not consist of a philosophical dissertation on the origin and the presence of evil in the world. Nor was it an abstruse harangue on the justice of God. His answer is: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me if you have understanding" (38:4). Again and again the mysteries of creation and its preservation are hurled at Job with the question: "Do you know? Have you comprehended?" When Job must remain speechless, God drives home the point of it all: "Will you even put Me in the wrong? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (40:8). Confronted with a Creator God of such

<sup>2</sup> Artur Weiser, *Die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1935); Eng. trans., Herbert Hartwell, *The Psalms* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 667.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1952), pp. 54 to 56.



power and wisdom, Job abhorred himself and repented in dust and ashes (42:6). Although he does not get a direct answer to the question why he is suffering, he is restored to a relationship of trust in God. The reminder of the wisdom of the Creator convinces Job that God knows why He is doing what He does also in the case of this particular creature of His. The reminder of the power of the Creator satisfies Job that God is able to shape the destiny of his little life so that he, like all creation, can glorify God.

### 3. Proverbs 8

Verses 22-31 of this chapter of Proverbs refer to creation for the express purpose of urging all men to "hear instruction and be wise" (v. 33). Wisdom is personified and portrayed as existing "at the first, before the beginning of the earth" (v. 23) and as being "beside Him [the Creator], . . . rejoicing before Him always" (v. 30). Wisdom of such a nature can be ignored only at the risk of life itself.

In summarizing our review of these longer passages, we can say that all of them develop the theme of creation for the same purpose that we noted in the shorter references of Scripture; they are designed to teach what man's attitude to God should be because of man's relationship to Him as his Creator. They do not treat of creation for its own sake or as a topic by itself. They are not intended primarily to give an account of the processes of creation.

### 4. Genesis 1 and 2

In our effort to place the references to creation in Scripture into their context, we finally come to the opening chapters of Scripture. At this point we are still not

attempting to determine directly what these chapters say about the "what" and the "how" of creation, but merely to see them in their larger context and thus to establish a perspective as an aid for their proper interpretation.

In all the rest of Scripture we found creation referred to in shorter or longer sections not primarily for the purpose of giving us an account of what happened. Creation is not described for its own sake but is given a supporting role. It serves as the basis or axiom of faith in a soteriological context. Reference is made to creation that man might the better know his Redeemer. Since He is at the same time the Creator who upholds all things by the word of His mouth and is therefore able to save to the uttermost, the believer has not misplaced his trust in such a Redeemer. Conversely, man owes his Redeemer praise, glory, honor, and obedience and is remiss if he withholds this response because the Creator has made him for no other purpose.

Does Genesis fit into this general framework? If by Scripture's own definition its prime purpose is to make us wise unto salvation, what part, if any, does the opening section of our Bible play in God's plan of salvation?

We will be going in the right direction in answering this question if we remind ourselves first of all of the fact that the Old Testament in its entirety is above all a history of salvation, *Heilsgeschichte*. We can use this term although it has been used improperly, for example, to imply that the record of these events is not historically true according to our canons of history. The whole Old Testament tells us how in the mystery and economy of revelation God proceeded through the cen-



turies to fulfill His promise of the Savior, "destined before the foundation of the earth" (1 Peter 1:20). All of it is pre-history of Jesus Christ. God determined that the Savior was not to be born immediately after man's fall into sin which doomed him to a disastrous separation from God. It is not for us to ask why but to believe that God knew what He was doing when He waited till the time of Caesar Augustus and Pontius Pilate for the *kairos*, the great moment of history when salvation was no longer promise but fact — on Christmas Day, on Good Friday, on Easter morning, on Ascension Day, and on Pentecost Day.

Many things were ordained of God to happen in the intervening history of mankind. But all of them were aimed at this great climax of history just as clearly and unerringly as the needle of the compass points to the magnetic north pole. Or, to use another figure of speech, this saving purpose runs like a golden thread all through the Old Testament.

From the fallen race of Adam God chose Abraham as the bearer of the promise. Of the descendants of Abraham, He chose Isaac. Through Isaac's son, Jacob, God created a people, a nation, again for the sole purpose that when His aim is achieved, Jesus could say: "Salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22)

The earliest redemption history that we have just summarized is set forth and marked out in the ten big chapters or series of *toledoth* (generations) of the Book of Genesis. They are the arrows on the signposts which point in the direction that God's road of salvation is to take.

Seen in this perspective of God's revelation, each of these ten chapters is not world

history as such, but they trace the first steps that God took toward Bethlehem and Golgotha. The first chapter heading or *toledoth* (2:4) ends in 4:26. It sets the stage by telling us that man, created in perfect harmony with God and in a world that was good as it left the creative hand of God, is now through the Fall in need of salvation and has received the first promise of that salvation.<sup>4</sup>

The second *toledoth* (5:1) likewise relates the history of Adam's descendants to Noah only to the extent that it gives us the links in the line of the bearers of God's promise and assures us that they survived in a wicked world that God had destroyed with the Flood.

The same holds true of the *toledoth* of the sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. All interest in general history is resolutely set aside to continue the thread of salvation in the *toledoth* of Shem (11:10) and in the *toledoth* of Terah (11:27), the father of Abraham. The line of the Edomites is merely mentioned in the *toledoth* of Esau and left undeveloped as if to indicate that the writer is aware of the existence of other people and wants to emphasize that the line of God's purpose continues in Jacob and his descendants and not in Esau and the Edomites. (Ch. 36)

<sup>4</sup> We do not have under the heading of this first series of *toledoth* a second creation account at variance with that of Chap. 1. Gerhard von Rad says in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Kaiser, 1957); Eng. trans., D. M. G. Stalker, *Theology of the Old Testament*: (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), I, p. 136 . . . "The Jahwist [as the source hypothesis calls the author of Chap. 2] . . . does not in fact treat of the creation of the world at all." Von Rad, however, does believe that Gen. 2 is based on a different cosmological view from that of Gen. 1.



When the 10th and last *toledoth* comes to a close at the end of Genesis, we are ready for the next major development in the history of salvation. The Book of Exodus shows that a whole nation, sprung from the loins of Jacob and his twelve sons, was designed to be the means by which salvation was to come for all people. The rest of the Old Testament is the account of how Israel served this purpose. Although it failed and was destroyed as a national entity, God found a way to carry out His promises through a remnant.

Now these early chapters of salvation history, these ten *toledoth* of Genesis, have in turn a prologue.<sup>5</sup> There are 34 verses that precede the first division of the book and contain the creation account. What we want to get into focus at this point is the place of these 34 verses in relation to the whole first book of salvation. We ought to be able to say that they are designed to have the function of an introduction: to lead *into* the subject matter that the book itself sets out to present. We can therefore conclude that the opening verses of Scripture have as their prime purpose to motivate and introduce the grand theme of Genesis (and of all subsequent books): what God did and said for man's salvation. As a prologue they set the stage, as it were, on which the drama of salvation is to be played. Von Rad says: "This soteriological understanding of creation also

<sup>5</sup> The term "prologue" is not to be understood as assigning to these opening verses a position of secondary importance or of detracting from their authority as the inspired Word of God (cf. the "prologue" of the Gospel according to John). What is revealed on the first page of Scripture is a basic and crucial article of faith, also *because* it is introductory to salvation history.

. . . lies at the basis of the creation stories in J and P. . . . From there they [these accounts] draw the line out toward themselves and toward Israel, the tabernacle, etc. . . . The expansion of the old credo by means of such a preface tremendously broadened the theological basis of the whole thing. . . . The beginning of this divine history was now put back in time to creation."<sup>6</sup>

At this point, then, we have merely tried to see the creation account in Genesis as it relates itself to the entire book with its ten *toledoth* and thereby to the entire Old Testament. We shall come back to the account itself later to try to establish what it does say in this context. If, however, our interpretation is to be valid, we must remember this context and dare not lose sight of the main purpose which this account is to serve in the perspective of the whole.

## II

### HOW DOES SCRIPTURE PRESENT ITS TEACHING OF CREATION?

We now turn again to the entire Old Testament to get a general view of how it presents its teaching about creation and thus achieves its purpose of making us wise unto salvation.

We said at the outset that the message of God's two books cannot but be in perfect harmony. If they are read as contradicting one another, the fault must lie in the way that one or the other or both are read and understood. The rules of interpretation vary in the two books. Each has its own language as the medium of conveying what God has to say. Perhaps we

<sup>6</sup> Pp. 138 f. Von Rad assumes that the Pentateuch took its present shape late in the history of the Old Testament.



should also say in passing that man will never be able to exhaust what it presented in both. As he reads in both, man must exclaim: "Oh, the depths of the mystery of God!" The Christian interpreter of both must therefore be prepared to let God say what He does and not insist that God's thoughts conform to his own way of thinking.

But if we as theologians want to tell the professional reader of the book of nature what the Bible says about creation, we must first of all briefly look at the language in which the message of Scripture is couched. Unless we recognize that God employed human language in various modes and forms of expression, we will fail to understand what God is saying and get a distorted picture of His revelation in Scripture.

Before we look at these various modes of expression, we might preface our investigation with the remark that we must keep in mind that regardless of the form of language used, Scripture is always wholly true. What it teaches also by means of a literary device or circumlocution is fact to be accepted as wholly true. It tells man how things are. Man is to know facts when he asks: What must I do to be saved? The Scriptures are factually true in all respects. Nevertheless, it is equally true that we must not confuse the factual truth with the literary form in which that truth is presented. What Scripture teaches in one mode of human speech must harmonize with what it teaches when it uses another way of expressing the same lesson. To distinguish these various forms they can be categorized by giving them labels. We shall try to group them under three broad classifications.

### *A. The Usual or Literal Meaning of Words*

The language used in Scripture is first of all composed of words that are to be understood directly or in their literal meaning. There is direct correspondence between the words in their usual sense and the meaning they are to convey. The words are the immediate bearers of the meaning. We need not cite many examples to illustrate what we mean when we say that the words of a passage (*sensus literae*) have a literal meaning (*sensus literalis*).

When God said to Israel: "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt," (Amos 2:10) there is a direct transfer of meaning from these words in their usual sense. They do not individually or collectively compose something unreal, a figure or picture, which is to be the medium of what they teach.<sup>7</sup>

### *B. The Figurative or Metaphysical Meaning of Words*

Scripture also teaches what is actually and literally true (*sensus literalis*) by using words that have a figurative sense.<sup>8</sup> The words themselves (*sensus literae*) are not the lesson, but what they teach is found in the picture that they form. At the risk of oversimplification, we include here

<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Fuerbringer, *Theologische Hermeneutik* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1912), p. 14: *Der Exeget hat anzunehmen, dass der Autor seine Worte in eigentlicher Bedeutung gebraucht hat und so verstanden wissen will, wenn nicht zwingende Gründe eine andere Auffassung fordern.* ("Unless there are cogent reasons to the contrary, the exegete must take it for granted that the author has used his words according to their real meaning, and that he wishes to have them so understood.")

<sup>8</sup> To distinguish between the literal and the figurative use of words in literature, scholars also use the terms "denotative" and "connotative."



everything that is called allegory or metaphor, as well as parable and fable.

Scripture itself must be consulted in an attempt to determine from the immediate or wider context whether words are used figuratively or not. Sometimes the point of comparison is given in the passage itself. This is the case in the parables when Jesus says that the kingdom of God is "like" something. The point of comparison is also clearly indicated in passages such as this: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:13). Usually we have no trouble recognizing the use of figurative language even when the passage itself does not alert us to its use. When God says to Israel: "I bore you on eagles' wings" (Ex. 19:4), no one is so foolish as to imagine that this means that in bringing the Israelites up from Egypt God supplied them with eagles upon which the nation could float through the air. Nor does this figurative way of speaking of the Exodus impair or invalidate the historical factuality of the nonfigurative statement: "I brought you up out of Egypt."

Sometimes it is more difficult to distinguish between the literal and the figurative use of words. We know what troubles we have convincing millennialists that Revelation 20 uses figurative language and that such an apparently factual datum as 1,000 years must be understood as a symbol of an indefinitely long period of time. Our control again is that since the rest of Scripture would be in conflict with the literal meaning of the words in this chapter, they must be taken figuratively.

Sometimes cogent reasons cannot be found to determine the question and we may be free to choose between two in-

terpretations if neither clashes with Scripture otherwise. The Song of Songs is such an example. There are other passages of Scripture where the bride-and-bridegroom or the husband-and-wife relationship is used as a comparison to teach the relationship of God to His people and of Christ to His church. On the other hand if the words are taken in their literal meaning, the passage describes the marital bliss and faithfulness, an accent which is also found in Scripture.

### *C. The Typological Meaning of Words*

We might say that when a passage has a typical meaning, it uses words both in a literal and a certain figurative sense. In Hos. 11:1 God says: "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This passage again means exactly what is conveyed by the words: "I brought you up out of the land of Egypt." But in its redemption from Egypt, this Israel after the flesh is also designed by God to be a figure or type of a much greater salvation wrought by the only Son of God, Jesus Christ, who likewise was brought back from Egypt. It is in this sense that Matthew (2:15) quotes this Old Testament passage.

After this brief survey of Biblical usage of language in general, as exemplified by references to the Exodus, we proceed to look at the way in which Scripture presents its teaching about creation. We shall find that here, too, it uses various modes of expression to tell us that our Redeemer is our Creator.

### *A. Literal*

Since what Scripture wants to teach us to make us wise to salvation is so often and clearly presented in nonfigurative



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language, we should expect that it also contains statements concerning creation that employ words in their literal meaning. Some of the passages we have quoted above belong in this category. Cf. Ps. 121:2; Prov. 16:4; Jer. 32:17; Mark 10:6; Rev. 4:11.

## B. Figurative

That the Redeemer God is also the Creator God is just as literally true when Scripture uses figurative language in teaching this lesson. Since poetry is a form of expression that by its very nature uses figures of speech, we should expect to find this mode of teaching especially in the poetic section of Scripture. Cf., for example, Ps. 8:3; Is. 48:13; 66:2.

These passages speak of the Creator as having hands and using them in the act of creation. No one would insist that if we want to accept what Scripture says about creation, we must also believe that God has hands and fingers. We call these particular figures of speech anthropomorphisms. Their use is not, however, restricted to poetry. We find them also in prose passages.<sup>9</sup>

God is a Being so high above our com-

<sup>9</sup> Fuerbringer, p. 13: *Anmerkung 5. Eine besondere Art von Tropen sind die Anthropomorphismen und Antropopathismen der Schrift, da Redeweisen, die vom menschlichen Leibe und von der menschlichen Seele und deren Kräften und Verrichtungen hergenommen sind, auf Gott übertragen werden.* ("A special and peculiar kind of tropes are the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms of Holy Scripture, that is, figures of speech in which parts of the human body and properties and functions of the human soul are attributed to God.") Fuerbringer enumerates the following examples from Scripture: Ps. 8:4; 18:16; 34:16; 104:2, 29, 30; Is. 30:30; 49:16; Nah. 1:3; Deut. 26:15.—Gen. 6:6 (1 Sam. 15:29); Gen. 18:21; 8:1; Ps. 13:2.—Gen. 8:21; 19:22; Ps. 104:32; Jer. 31:26.

prehension that we can get some inkling of who and what He is and what He does only by analogy with ourselves. God is not a Father as we become fathers. The Son is born of the Father, but not as our sons are born. The Spirit that proceeds from the Father and the Son is not a wind or breath in the normal sense of the Hebrew and Greek words.

We have become so accustomed to some of these figurative ways of speaking about God that we are not perturbed by them and are hardly aware that they are actually very daring modes of expression. Even when we are told that God "said" or "spoke", we are confronted with an anthropomorphism. God does not have speech organs that produce sounds as ours do.

In describing God as Creator and Preserver of His people, Scripture goes beyond ordinary anthropomorphisms. It does not hesitate to use figurative language that retains echoes of ancient heathen mythology. (Ps. 89:10; Is. 51:9, 10; Ps. 74:12-16; Job 9:13; 26:12, 13)

It should be noted, however, that "in all the Old Testament passages which speak of a struggle between the Almighty, on the one hand, and Rahab, Leviathan, and their variant designations, on the other, the terms under consideration are mere figures of speech applied to powerful nations which are hostile to God or His people, although we may not always be able at this remote point of time to determine with certainty what particular nation is meant. . . . There is, accordingly, no evidence in these Bible passages of a conflict preceding the creation, but there are very good reasons for placing these struggles after the creation. The whole theory of a Hebrew cosmogony in which the making of heaven



and earth was preceded by a contest between the Creator and certain monsters, as in *Enuma elish*, thus falls to the ground."<sup>10</sup>

Even where Rahab and Leviathan are not mentioned by name, there are allusions to and use of expressions from the ancient myths. Through most of Psalm 104, for example, there is a strain of descriptive expressions that appear to derive their form from the heathen cosmogonies. "The poet has taken his colors from the palette of the ancient nature mythology . . . and has painted with them this picture, which, subduing everything that is of a mythical and pagan nature, serves the representation of one religious idea only: the idea that God has created the celestial world for His own sake so that it might serve His will, bear witness to His power and wisdom, and reveal His glory."<sup>11</sup>

In other words, in this psalm and in other similar passages the Old Testament speaks of God's acts in poetic language which appears also in mythology but has been fully demythologized and in this language teaches us to praise our Creator and Preserver. It would be folly to press these words and to give them a literal meaning as if they were meant to tell us how God created the world.

We must also keep in mind that such passages speak of a cosmology, the created structure of the universe, in poetic, that is, figurative language. It would be doing violence to the intent of the sacred writer to say that it must be true in a literal sense that there are windows in the heavens, pillars upon which the world rests, and

that the earth has four corners. Here Weiser is inconsistent when he says of Psalm 104: "The poet reflects upon the origin of the earth: God has driven away the primordial flood which once covered the mountains (v. 6) by the voice of his thunder (v. 7) and has set an impassable bound to the water (v. 9: cf. Job 38:10). Thus the earth, shaped like a circular disc, now floats on the ocean and is yet firmly established on invisible foundations (v. 5); like the celestial palace, it is a wonderful miracle wrought by God."<sup>12</sup>

To get a proper understanding of what Scripture teaches about creation, we must therefore be fully aware that it frequently presents its teaching in metaphorical language. In other words, Scripture employs many figures of speech in its reference to the Creator and His act of creation which must be recognized as such and dare not be pressed as having a literal meaning.

### C. Typological

Scripture finally speaks of creation in a typological sense. What the Creator once did is used as a type of a fulfillment, the final consummation of what God once made. The antitype is called "the new heaven and the new earth." We are told to expect this new creation. Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:2.

### III

#### WHAT IS TAUGHT IN GENESIS 1 AND 2 AND CLEARLY SUPPORTED ELSEWHERE IN SCRIPTURES?

So far we have merely set the stage for a discussion of the creation account in Genesis. Our purpose was to let this

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2d ed., 1951), pp. 108, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Weiser, p. 667.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Cf. Carl Gaenssle, "Velikovsky and the Hebrew Bible," *CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY*, (Feb. 1952), 105—114.



passage find its place in the full Biblical perspective. We have seen that creation in Scripture is always made the basis for the fact that God the Redeemer is the God of creation. Creation is referred to in order that man might know what his relationship to his Maker is, what the Creator has done and is doing to save him, how man is to respond to this Redeemer Creator.

We have also seen that what Scripture tells us of creation is to be accepted by faith as true. But this truth is presented in various forms and modes of human language. In some passages the words have their obvious literal meaning. In others the fact of creation is clothed in figurative language. And finally creation is spoken of as a type which will be fulfilled in an antitype, the new heaven and the new earth.

If we let Scripture interpret Scripture in this way, we should now be in a position to see what the Genesis account teaches. To do so adequately would require another paper at least as long as this one. We shall merely deal with those aspects of these opening chapters which are also taught clearly in other parts of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> In this way we shall also become involved in the question to what extent this account is presented in figurative language or in a poetic framework.

1. Genesis and the rest of Scripture refute every notion of a naturalistic origin of heaven and earth and all that is therein, animate and inanimate. Therefore there is

<sup>13</sup> Establishing the support for the teaching of Genesis regarding creation from other parts of Scripture does not imply that only such truths of Holy Writ must be accepted as are taught in more than one passage.

no such thing as a materialistic evolution. It is the consensus of the many, many passages strewn throughout the pages of Scripture that God is not a part of matter, but a self-sufficient, independent personal Being, outside and above what He has made. Scripture gives the lie to every form of monism.

2. Inherent in this teaching is the refutation of the theory that creation is the result of an emanation of God, that is, every form of pantheism. In calling heaven and earth into being by His Word, God remained distinct from it after the event occurred. Again there is no need to recall the passages of Scripture which sustain this teaching of Genesis.

3. Genesis and the rest of Scripture teach us furthermore that in the beginning there was only God. Matter is not eternal. God existed before time began. He was there and gave creation its beginning in a dimension that reckons with and is regulated by the flow of time. In this connection we need only to remind ourselves of the familiar psalm verse: "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." (Ps. 90:2)

4. Just as Genesis and the rest of Scripture insist that God made the world when He alone existed, so they also teach that God did not make heaven and earth out of preexistent material. Whatever the relationship of the rest of the chapter (where God is said to let the earth or water produce something) is to the first verse (in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth), there was no preexistent substance or matter that antedated the creative



Word of God. John 1:3; Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3 explicitly teach the nonexistence of anything which served God as material in originating all things. Scripture teaches a *creatio ex nihilo*.

Genesis and the rest of Scripture furthermore indicate this unique action of God in bringing forth and ordering the universe by reserving the verb *bara* only for God as subject or agent. The same holds true of the New Testament use of the verb  $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\zeta\omega$ .

Scripture indeed uses other verbs, such as "to form" and "to make," in speaking of God's creative work which denote actions of which man also is capable. Many of the passages that we have quoted above use these verbs. They also occur in Gen. 1 and 2. The fact is that no human vocable is capable of expressing this divine action because it transcends all human experience. Every verb in our vocabulary falls short of expressing the miraculous creative act of God. Even the word *bara* is found in cognate languages to mean: to scrape, to mold, to form; that is, to denote action predicated also of man. But when Scripture reserves this particular verb to denote what God alone can do, we are justified in regarding it as a shorthand symbol of that divine activity which "calls into existence the things that do not exist" so that "what is seen was made out of things which do not appear." (Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3)

God created through His Word. He spoke, and it was there. Von Rad says: "The conception of creation by means of the Word is to be taken as an interpretation of *bara*."<sup>14</sup> In telling us this, Scrip-

ture does not make the mystery any less. But it does enforce some of the factors which we have already mentioned. Because creation comes into existence by the Word of God, it is distinct from God. "The only continuity between God and His work is His Word" (Ibid.). And yet creation by His Word establishes a very close relationship of that which He has made to Him. It is His very own, made to serve His purpose. (Cf. Is. 48:13; Ps. 33:6; Heb. 11:3.)

Genesis 1 and 2 relate some of the words spoken by God in the process of creation. We do not have a record, however, of the words which He spoke when He created heaven and earth in 1:1. Perhaps we can say that the phrase heaven and earth denotes the matter or material which further obeyed the creative commands of God. The injunctions of God, "Let there be" or "Let the earth bring forth" tell of God's will

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*bara*, create, contains both the idea of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo*, since it is never connected with any statement of the material. The hidden pathos of this statement is that God is the Lord of the world. But not only in the sense that He subjected a preexisting chaos to His will!"

In his interpretation of the Gospel of John, Rudolf Bultmann comments on John 1:3:

Mit Nachdruck wird also gesagt, dass alles, ohne Ausnahme, durch den Logos geschaffen ward; über das Wie und Wann aber fehlt jede Reflexion. Das  $\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\tau\omicron$  ist reiner Ausdruck des Schöpfungsgedankens und schliesst den Emanationsgedanken ebenso aus wie die Vorstellung von einer ursprünglichen Dualität von Licht und Finsternis und von der Entstehung der Welt aus einem tragischen Zusammenstoss dieser beiden Mächte. Ausgeschlossen ist auch die griechische Anschauung, die die Welt aus der Korrelation von Form und Stoff begreifen will; die Schöpfung ist nicht die Ordnung einer chaotischen Materie, sondern die  $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\eta$  κόσμου (17: 24), *creatio ex nihilo*. (Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 12th ed. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1953), p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> P. 142. On page 47 he says: "It means a creative activity, which on principle is without analogy. It is correct to say that the verb



for the development of each of His creations. The earth and the sea are said to produce the plant and animal world; even man is formed from the earth. But the ability of plant life to be alive in producing fruit and seed for the continuation of its living organism, the life principle of animals and man, and man's image of God were not inherent in the material world but were created by the fiat will of God.

5. Genesis and the rest of Scripture teach that we live in a world whose vast forces are not autonomous. We are not victims of the haphazard whims of chaos. God holds the world that He has created in the hollow of His hand. This fact saves us from despair and a pessimistic worldview which subjects man to brute and arbitrary powers. It also guards us against idolatry and the deification of nature.

6. Genesis and the rest of Scripture teach that nature, material things, even our bodies, are not to be despised. The refrain "It is good" after each creative word of God guards against a spiritualization which regards the tangible creation as of questionable value or even as an imprisonment from which we are to escape.

7. Genesis and the rest of Scripture teach that evil is "not ontological, a necessary part of being; evil is historical, something that is not necessary but that is actual."<sup>15</sup> While neither Genesis nor Scripture anywhere for that matter solves the mystery of the origin of evil, it rules out every form of dualism, that is, the thought that good and evil oppose one another as separate and independent forces. Evil did not develop, it happened.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Finegan, *A Path Through Genesis* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), p. 23.

8. Genesis and the rest of Scripture teach that God created and endowed man in a way that was especially good above the "It was good" applied to the other creatures. Man received the capacity to respond to God in perfect accord with His will. Man could praise his Creator by a higher type of obedience than any other being. Somewhat in the role of God's representative or vice-regent, man, created in God's image, was to have rule over creation and make it serve His purposes.

9. Genesis and the rest of Scripture also teach that man ruined this blissful con-created relationship with his Creator. The disruption of this bliss and the following negation of God's original purpose came as the result of the disobedience of the first man and the first woman that God created. There were no other creatures like them who were made in the image of God and who for a time at least preserved it intact.

There may be a problem in determining at what point in the opening chapter of Genesis the word *adam* should be translated "man" or "mankind" in general and at what point this word becomes a proper noun, a Mr. Adam. But the account of the Fall leaves no doubt that only two individuals were involved. Later we are told that this individual, named Adam in the account, begot sons, that is, individuals in his image.

Scripture clearly derives the need of all men for a restoration to the primeval relationship to God from the fall of the first parents of man. The actuality of the fall of Adam and Eve, two individuals, is the unargued presupposition for the lost condition of all men and of the necessity of a Savior from sin. The insistence that there



is only one Savior is predicated on the fact that there was only one through whom the need of redemption arose. This is the point that is made in 1 Cor. 15:44-49, 57, as well as in Rom. 5:12, 15-19 (cf. also 1 Tim. 2:13, 14; 1 Cor. 11:8, 9). It is quibbling and beside the point to argue that because one "man" is mentioned, whereas in reality it was a woman that first broke the law of God, we need not take seriously or literally the fact that Adam and Eve were individuals.

The points listed above do not exhaust the teaching of Genesis which is corroborated, repeated, and interpreted in other parts of Scripture. They do, however, constitute an irreducible minimum of what the first pages of Holy Writ, regardless of form or language, require us to believe because it is also taught in other passages of the inspired Word.

A review of these doctrines also confirms our previous observation that the references to creation are not designed primarily to add to our knowledge regarding the processes involved in God's creative activity, but serve the express purpose of Scripture: to make us wise unto salvation. Are we not justified in concluding therefore that the Genesis account also is not designed primarily to shed light on the miraculous "how" of creation but is to be read in the great soteriological context of God's revelation?

At the same time, these articles of faith, revealed by God as necessary for knowledge of salvation, will not be called into question by the believing reader of His other book, the book of nature. He is indeed free to supplement what he reads in Scripture by what he reads in the book of nature. From the ancillary character of Scripture's teaching about creation (that is, primarily

as a basis and support of the teaching of salvation) he can conclude that it leaves facets of the nature of created beings and things and of the "how" of creation undefined and subject to his inquiry. This freedom also implies, as we have previously noted, that he is aware that he is applying hermeneutical principles that are based on sight and reason. What he concludes and sees will be in harmony with what he sees with the eyes of his faith, as outlined in the nine points above.

And so there may be differences of opinion on some points among those who read by faith as well as by sight. We shall mention only one question on which interpreters of Scripture and of nature reach different conclusions. It concerns the term "day" in Gen. 1 and 2. There are those who claim that Scripture, if properly interpreted, does not demand that this term denotes the lapse of time that we know as determined from sun-up to sun-down. No doubt they seek to establish this interpretation because of what they read in the book of nature. But they also claim that this view is in harmony with the book of Scripture if it is properly read. The following points are made to support their contention:

1. Scripture does not say that the length of the day was 24 hours, the lapse of time measured today by the rising and setting of the sun.

2. Although Scripture speaks of evening and morning, the usual designation of a 24-hour day, we must not press the language, as little as we should insist on a literal meaning of other figurative or anthropomorphic terms that are used by Scripture to report God's creative and miraculous activity, e.g., the description of



heaven and earth as owing its origin to the work of God's hands.

3. It is significant that the limits of the seventh day are not given, indicating that this "day" has not ended.

4. The word "day" is merely a part of an extended figurative or anthropomorphic description of what transpired at creation. In the whole account of Genesis, God employs human concepts and categories to tell us what is far beyond our power of comprehension. He can give us some inkling of what it means that He created all things only if He describes the fact of this great miracle as a process enunciated in human thought patterns.

Meredith Kline, a recognized scholar and one of those who continue in the J. Gresham Machen tradition, is an exponent of this view. In a recent article he says:

"The divine author has employed the imagery of an ordinary week to provide a figurative chronological framework for the account of his [God's] creative acts. And if it is a figurative week, then it is not a literal week of twenty-four-hour days. Furthermore, once the figurative nature of the chronological pattern is appreciated, the literalness of the sequence is no more sacrosanct than the literalness of the duration of the days in this figurative week. Whether the events narrated occurred in the order of their narration would, as far as the chronological framework of Gen. 1 is concerned, be an open exegetical question. The question is actually closed in favor of the nonchronological interpretation by the exegetical evidence of Gen. 25."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained" [Gen. 2:5], *The Westminster Theological Journal*, XX (Nov. 1957 to May 1958), 156 f.

The question of the literary form and framework of Gen. 1 is not new to the church. Origen and Augustine had already discussed it in the early church. Since the latter suggested that creation was *instantaneous*, he did not regard the form of Gen. 1 as of the substance of the account.

The highly artistic arrangement of Gen. 1 has also long been noted. While it lacks the characteristic parallelism of Hebrew poetry, a rhythmic balance is patent in the overall symmetrical arrangement of its parts. Charles Hauret's<sup>17</sup> diagram of the content of Gen. 1 is on the next page.

In the *Westminster Journal* (November 1962), Edward J. Young, a colleague of Kline, calls attention to the lack of a fully consistent pattern in the phrases and the sequence of the creative acts. His strictures are worth noting, although he recognizes the existence of a general pattern of balance in the account. Without entering the question whether he has succeeded in invalidating the interpretation of the days as a part of the figurative framework of the account, we might call attention to the fact that these divergent views were permitted to appear in the same journal.

In support of an artistic arrangement of Gen. 1 and its schematic use of number, the recurring and therefore symbolic use of the number three is regarded as significant: three times names are given (1:5, 8, 10); three blessings (1:22, 28; 2:3); three kinds of plants (1:11, 12); three kinds of animals (1:24, 25); three times *bara* is used in the creation of man (1:27); a verse, which in addition, has the

<sup>17</sup> *Beginnings: Genesis and Modern Science* (Dubuque: The Priory Press, 1955), pp. 69 to 71.



## THE CREATION ACCOUNT OF GENESIS

## Prologue (vv. 3-31): résumé and key

Narrative proper (vv. 3-31): two symmetrical periods of three days each:

Day	Works	Ordering of	Appointments of	Works	Day
1st	1	Light is separated from darkness (day and night) (3-5)	Creation of the sun (for the day) and the moon and stars (for the night) (14-19)	5	4th
2d	2	The two abysses (air and water) are separated (6-8)	Creation of the birds (for the air) and of fish (for the sea) (20-23)	6	5th
3d	{ 3 4	Dry land separated from the watery areas (continent) and the production of the plant (9-13)	Creation of the animals and of man (24-31)	{ 7 8	6th

Conclusion (2:1-3): the divine Worker rests

distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry, parallelism.

The Jewish scholar Cassuto claims: "Akadian and Ugaritic literature . . . prove that a series of seven consecutive days was considered a perfect period in which to develop an important work, the action lasting six days and reaching its conclusion and outcome on the seventh day."<sup>18</sup>

What about the rest of Scripture? Does this interpretation do violence to other express statements of God's Word?

In answer to these questions it is pointed out that in the many passages describing or alluding to the making of heaven and earth that abound in the pages of the Bible there is a significant absence of references to the 6-day period as an essential or integral part of the teaching of creation nor is it used in support of the soteriological purpose of Scriptural revelation. The only exceptions are Ex. 29:9-11 and Ex. 31:12-17.

<sup>18</sup> V. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1961), p. 13. Cf. Theodor Schwegler, *Die Biblische Urgeschichte* (Munich: Verlagsbuchhandlung Anton Pustet, 1960), p. 52.

Here indeed the six days are not only mentioned but are clearly made the basis of instruction in righteousness. These passages have therefore been quoted by sincere believers in the authority of Scripture as clinching the argument in favor of a literal meaning of the days. They maintain that in these instances a direct and convincing parallel is established between the normal work days of man and the days of the week of creation. If Scripture interprets Scripture, then these verses should be regarded as God's own commentary of what He says in Genesis: the days in the creation account must be taken as literally as the days that elapse between Sabbaths.

Proponents of the figurative meaning of the days who also want to be obedient to Scripture are not unaware of the weight of this argument.<sup>19</sup> But they are not con-

<sup>19</sup> It should also be noted that they do not deny that the account is to be understood as describing an actual event nor do they wish to minimize the miraculous nature of God's act of creation. Miracles are not to be reduced to mere metaphors or figures of speech. The first verse of Genesis cannot be made to say: "In the beginning, it was as if God created the heavens and the earth."



vinced that these passages invalidate their interpretation. In this connection Meredith Kline has the following to say:

Of greater significance for the life of man than these merely literary devices is the Sabbathic pattern of the overall structure of Gen. 1:1—2:3. For the Creator's way in the day that He made the earth and the heavens must be the way of His image-bearer also. The precise ratio of man's work to his rest is a matter of following the chronological structure of the revelation in which God was pleased to record His creation triumph. The aeons of creation history could have been divided into other than six periods. For temporally the "days" are not of equal length (cf., e. g., the seventh "day" which is everlasting), and logically the infinitely diversified creative works were susceptible of analysis into other than six divisions. But the Creator in His wisdom, adapting the proportions of the ordinance, it would seem, to the constitutional needs of man, chose to reveal His creative acts in terms of six "days" of work followed by a seventh "day" of rest.

The divine demand for human imitation inherent in the Sabbathic pattern of that revelation becomes articulate in the fourth [third] word of the decalogue. The comparison there drawn between the divine original and the human copy is fully satisfied by the facts that in each case there is the Sabbathic principle and the six-one ratio.<sup>20</sup>

Support for this view is also found in Ex. 31:17, which reads: "In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day He rested and *was refreshed*."

The last clause literally means: to catch one's breath as the result of exhaustion or fatigue. This rather unusual verb form occurs also in Ex. 23:12, where it refers again to the purpose of the Sabbath as the day on which "the son of your handmaid and the alien may be *refreshed*." In 2 Sam. 16:14 we are told that "the king [David], and all the people with him, arrived weary at the Jordan; and there he *refreshed himself*." No one believes that this expression in Ex. 31:17 is to be taken in its literal sense to mean that God was exhausted by His work of creation and was in need of refreshment. If this part of the verse is clearly an anthropomorphism, do we not have a good indication — so the argument runs — that the immediately preceding words about the days should be understood in the same way?

This essay does not presume to have given a definite answer. It has merely sought to call attention to some significant considerations that have a bearing on the interpretation of the creation account and to lay down some principles within the framework of which a solution of the problem is to be sought.

At this point it appears that neither the literal nor the nonliteral view regarding the days of creation can incontestably be demonstrated. To permit differing opinions to be held in this matter, does not, however, impugn or vitiate the clarity or perspicuity of Scripture. For as in the case of every exegetical problem, only such an interpretation can be declared untenable as is clearly in conflict with other pertinent passages.

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<sup>20</sup> Kline, pp. 154 f.