

The Biblical Account of Creation and Modern Theology

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As God's redeemed children, justified by faith in Christ Jesus, we approach His holy Word with deepest reverence, awe, and joy. In the Bible we hear the God of our salvation speaking to us. His words are spirit, and they are life.¹ To us, as to the Psalmist, His Word is sweeter than honey and the honeycomb.² To us, too, it is better than thousands of gold and silver.³

To us, as to God's people through the ages, the Bible is so precious because it was through these Scriptures, "given by inspiration of God,"⁴ that the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, and it is through these Scriptures that He keeps us in faith unto our end. With life giving light they cast their bright beams into the deep darkness of hearts hopelessly estranged by nature from God. Here, indeed, we have, as Peter declares, "a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place."⁵ Here we have a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.⁶ Through this Word we have learned to know our Savior, and through faith in Him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life,"⁷ we have the sure hope of eternal life.

For us it is then also an article of faith that, since the Bible is God's Word, it is true—true in all of its words, true in all of its parts. We are not ready to concede even the possibility that there could be errors in the Bible, even when it treats of scientific, geographical, or chronological matters. "God is not a man that He should lie."⁸ Speaking to His heavenly Father in His high-priestly prayer on the night in which He was betrayed, our Savior asserts, "Thy Word is truth."⁹

It is with this attitude, with the *a priori* "bias" (as some would call it) of faith, with a ready willingness to listen to our God, that we approach the Biblical account of creation recorded in the Book of Genesis. We frankly confess that our God-given faith is a basic presupposition in our interpretation of Genesis.

Let it also be said, moreover, that there is not and cannot be an unbiased or unprejudiced approach to Genesis, Chapters I and II. Anyone who does not approach these chapters as a believing child of God, ready to listen to his heavenly Father, approaches them with the questioning and doubting attitude of unbelief. "He that is not with me is against me," Jesus says.¹⁰ So also he who is not with Him is against Him in his approach to the written Word of God. When men question the historicity of Genesis, it is the serpent's voice asking in modern accents, "Yea, hath God said?"¹¹ For the Scriptures are a whole. One cannot do violence to the entire two chapters of Genesis without doing violence to the entire Word of God. When Jesus says of the Scriptures, they "testify of me,"¹² those Scriptures of which He is speaking include the first and second chapters of Genesis. For us, then, these chapters must be viewed "*sub specie Christi*," to use an expression of a modern German

¹ John 6:63

² Psalm 19:10

³ Psalm 119:72

⁴ II Timothy 3:16

⁵ II Peter 1:19

⁶ Psalm 119:105

⁷ John 14:6

⁸ Numbers 23:19

⁹ John 17:17

¹⁰ Matthew 12:30

¹¹ Genesis 3:1

¹² John 5:39

theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in his interpretation, however, unfortunately fails to carry through this point of view.¹³ In reading Genesis I and II, the basic question again is, “What think ye of Christ?”¹⁴

In the Prologue to his Gospel the Apostle John forcefully reminds us that Genesis I testifies of Christ when he, obviously echoing the “In the beginning” of Genesis 1:1, writes, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made.”¹⁵ The Word by whom all things were made is the pre-incarnate Christ. For John informs us, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only Begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”¹⁶

In this connection Luther’s words are frequently quoted that it is Scripture that tells us of Christ (*was Christum treibet*). But it is a mistaken interpretation that is placed upon these words when it is asserted that Luther was therefore ready to dismiss some portions of Scripture as of no consequence.¹⁷ What Luther says is this: “All the genuine sacred books agree in preaching Christ and placing the emphasis on Him.”¹⁸

Through the centuries Christians have been aware of the interrelation between the Old Testament and the New. This interrelation is well defined in the words attributed to Augustine:

The New is in the Old concealed;
The Old is in the New revealed.¹⁹

These considerations are basic as we now proceed with the subject assigned for this paper, “The Biblical Account of Creation and Modern Theology.” It is evident that this is a broad subject. To remain within the time allotted, our discussion must be limited to certain aspects of it. We are therefore refraining from a discussion of the documentary hypothesis, the theory that is, almost without exception, accepted by modern theology that there are two separate versions of the creation story in Genesis I and II. We have chosen to restrict our discussion to two questions that are the subject of lively debate in the theological world of today. These questions are:

- I. How are we to view the Genesis record? Is it a recital of actual historical facts, or is it a mythological (symbolical) presentation of religious truth? This, then, is a hermeneutical question.
- II. Can the Biblical account of creation be harmonized with modern evolutionary theory and with the so-called “assured results” of scientific investigation?

I

How are we to view the Genesis record? Is it to be understood literally, as a factual account of actual historical events? Or does it have another meaning from that which appears to lie on the surface?

For us it is self-evident that we have here a recital of actual historical facts. For us this is a matter of faith. It is a conviction produced in our hearts by the Holy Ghost. For the whole Bible treats the Genesis account of creation as actual history. There is not a hint, not a suggestion that the Genesis record is symbolical,

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall, A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3*, London, 1959, p.7 (Lectures at the University of Berlin, 1932-1933. Translation by John C. Fletcher, SCM Press, Ltd.).

¹⁴ Matthew 22:42

¹⁵ John 1:1-3

¹⁶ John 1:14

¹⁷ C.F. Edward J. Young, *The Study of Old Testament Theology Today*, London, 1958, p.16. (Young is Professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, Pa.)

¹⁸ Ewald Plass, *What Luther Says*, Vol. III, St. Louis, Mo., 1959, p.1464, Footnote 9.

¹⁹ Young, op. cit., p. 37. Cf. also Note 4, p. 59: “Augustine: *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, II, LXXIII, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. XXXIV, Col. 623, *Quamquam et in vetere novum lateat, et in novo vetus pateat*. Lic. Wilhelm Moeller quotes it on the title page of his *Theologie des Alten Testaments* in this way: *ovum Testamentum in Vetere latet; Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet*.

allegorical, or mythological. Raymond F. Surburg has counted up some 75 passages in the Old and New Testaments that speak of God's creative work.²⁰

Let us hear just a few. Exodus 20:11, "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." Here, we note, it is God Himself who is speaking. Appearing to Moses and the people of Israel on Mt. Sinai, He gives them His holy Law and in reference to the Third Commandment relates how He created all things.

When the remnant of the Jews had returned from Babylon and had rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, they held a solemn assembly. Certain of the Levites led them in prayer. In this prayer they confessed: "Thou, even Thou, art Lord alone: Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and Thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth Thee."²¹ In this context the work of creation is placed on an equal plane with such historical events as the calling of Abraham, the years of bondage in Egypt, the miraculous dividing of the Red Sea, the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, and the conquest of Canaan.

There is an abundance of references to God's creative work in the books of Job, Psalms, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and scattered references elsewhere in the Old Testament. Even in the poetical books, however, the context of these passages shows that the sacred writers viewed the Genesis account as actual history, not as symbolism, allegory, or myth. Listen to the Psalmist, writing in Psalm 33:6, 9, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... For He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast." Furthermore, although the prophets are often given to the use of highly poetic language and figures of speech, there is not the slightest indication of any kind that they are employing figures of speech with regard to God's work of creation when they write as, for example, Isaiah does: "Thus saith the Lord God, He that created the heavens, and stretched them out; He that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; He that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein."²²

Turning to the New Testament, we find that the holy writers here take for granted that the Biblical account of creation in Genesis is historical fact, just as do the authors of the Old Testament. Of the many examples which might be brought from Paul's writings we refer only to his quotation in I Corinthians 15:45: "It is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul," and the reference in I Timothy 2:13, 14: "Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews stresses that the creation account is to be accepted by faith: "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."²³

Decisive for us is, finally, also the way our Savior Himself speaks of the events in Genesis 1-3 as actual historical facts. "Have ye not read," He says, directing our attention to that which has been written and taking for granted that it is historically true, "that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?"²⁴

For us this testimony of the entire Scriptures is conclusive. It makes no difference to us that we are accused of begging the question, as some charge, claiming that the very issue is whether the language of all these Scriptural references is symbolical or mythological. We accept them as true "through faith," as the Epistle

²⁰ In Darwin, *Evolution, and Creation*, Edited by Paul A. Zimmermann, St. Louis, 1959, p. 39, he lists: Gen. 1:1-3 (cf. 1:1-31; 2:1-15); Ex. 20:11; I Sam. 2:8; Neh. 9:6; Job 12:8,9; 26:7,13; 28:24-26; 37:16,18; 38:4,7-10; Ps. 8:3; 19:1,2; 33:6-9; 65:6; 74:16,17; 78:69; 89:11,12; 90:2; 95:4,5; 102:25; 103:22; 104:2-6; 119:90; 124:8; 136:5-9; 148:5; Prov. 3:19; 8:26-29; 30:4; Eccl. 3:11; 11:5; Isa. 40:12,26,28; 42:5; 44:24; 45:7-12,18; 48:13; 51:13; 66:2; Jer. 5:22; 10:12; 27:5; 31:35; 32:17; 33:2; 51:15,16; Amos 4:13; 5:8; 9:6; Jonah 1:9; Zech. 12:1; Mal. 2:10; John 1:3,10; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Rom. 4:17; 11:36; I Cor. 8:6; II Cor. 4:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16,17; I Tim. 6:13; Heb. 1:2,10; 2:10; 3:4; 11:3; Rev. 4:11; 10:6; 14:7. (This list is not complete.)

²¹ Nehemiah 9:6

²² Isaiah 42:5

²³ Hebrews 11:3

²⁴ Matthew 19:4-5

to the Hebrews puts it. For us there can therefore be no thought of seeing in the Genesis record mere symbolism, poetic folklore, or traces of a Babylonian mythological tradition.

“Thy Word is truth,” our Savior declares concerning the Scriptures, and “The Scripture cannot be broken.”²⁵ Like all the rest of Scripture, the Biblical account of creation is truth. We most emphatically reject the claim that it is merely a human vehicle for conveying divine truth that each person must seek to discover from it for himself by a process of demythologizing, that is, by attempting to sift the abstract from the concrete, the reality from the framework of unreality in which it is supposed to be couched. The only correct and proper method of interpreting the Bible is to understand it, like any other writing, in the obvious, normal sense, unless the author himself indicates in some way that he does not want to be understood literally. Throughout the ages both Jewish and Christian expositors, with few exceptions, have regarded the Biblical account of creation as factual and historical. And so do we.

This approach, which for us is self-evident, is not self-evident in the rest of the theological world of today. In the writings of modern theologians we are immediately confronted, however, with a problem because of the fact that they use words in a sense that is different from the ordinary, accepted meaning. As a result, these men often mean the very opposite of what they seem to say. Their critical, unorthodox approach is veiled in what appears to be orthodox terminology.

In a recent article in the *Lutheran Witness*²⁶ Robert Preus submitted a perceptive and frank critique of the writings of three renowned modern theologians, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and Karl Barth. All of them, he says, are guilty of writing “in a manner so abstruse, so difficult to comprehend, that hardly any two theologians can agree on just what” they are saying. All of them, he furthermore correctly contends, have failed to make their theology relevant to modern man because “they indulge in what we must bluntly call double talk.” They call such double talk “dialectical” language.

As an example of such double talk Preus refers to Barth’s frequent assertion, “The Bible is God’s Word.” He then explains, “But by this statement he does not mean anything so plain and unambiguous as the church has always meant by the same expression. Later in our reading we find that the little word *is* in the statement means for Barth that the Bible ‘becomes God’s Word when God lets it be His Word.’ *In itself*, Barth believes, the Bible is *not* God’s Word. Barth’s statement means something quite different from what the words seem to imply.” It is because these theologians clothe their thoughts in traditional Christian terminology while using it in an entirely different sense, that one must examine their writings so carefully to recognize the wolf in sheep’s clothing.

A third ground for criticism is the fact that these three representative modern theologians deny many basic Christian truths. Preus offers Bultmann as an example. “Bultmann seeks to make modern theology relevant by making it speak always to ‘human existence;’ so far so good. To accomplish this, he ‘demythologizes,’ or strips away, everything concerning God’s Scripture-recorded acts which he feels modern man cannot accept. Miracles, Christ’s incarnation, His atonement, and His resurrection are myths; they never really happened, he says. But these myths may serve to help us to understand ‘human existence,’ he contends.”

Although Bultmann’s writings are principally in the New Testament field, his demythologizing method has been eagerly taken over by Old Testament scholars. We will have more to say about that shortly.

First of all, however, let us listen to another example of dialectical language. William Neil of the University of Nottingham published a book in 1954 called *The Rediscovery of the Bible*.²⁷ Notice how Neil uses the word “historicity”: “It would be correct to say at the outset that one of the newer insights into the nature of the contents of the Bible is an enhanced respect for the historicity of the records. Now at once it is clear that this raises a problem, namely, what do we mean by historicity? If we mean the detailed accuracy of every individual incident in the Old and New Testaments, we are obviously throwing ourselves into the arms of the fundamentalists and verbal inspirationists, an embrace which no self-respecting student of the Bible would relish.”(!) Neil contends that some incidents of the Bible that, for example, “describe animals that talk, an axe-

²⁵ John 17:17; 10:35

²⁶ September 5, 1961. p.422.

²⁷ Harper and Brothers, New York: p.83f.

head that floats, and a sun that stands still” are “fantastic tales” which were originally meant to be treated “as vehicles of moral or religious truth.”²⁸ He also says, “The compilers of the Old Testament were no primitive children of the forest, living in a world of fairy tale and black magic. The editors of the Book of Genesis no more believed than we do that God walked about in the Garden of Eden, or that the serpent chatted to Adam and Eve. But they were not afflicted with having to get the point of these incidents across to a literally minded generation which tends to reason that if God did not walk about in the Garden of Eden, as the Bible says, there cannot be a God at all.”²⁹ “We must openly and readily admit that the early stories of Genesis are pure symbolism,” he adds, while at the same time speaking about “an enhanced respect for the historicity of the records.”

When Neil speaks about the early stories of Genesis as being “pure symbolism,” he is embracing the approach that is representative of modern theology. It is contended that it never was the author’s intention that these stories should be understood literally, but that they were his means of teaching religious and moral truths. This is what Neil calls “the rediscovery of the Bible.”

See what he does with the creation story: “The Bible starts off with the impressive words: ‘In the beginning God.’ So begins the Prologue. There follow, not a matter-of-fact record of the order of creation, or the stages of the development of life, but three theological assertions. One, that the universe exists because God exists; two, that man, unlike any other created thing, has a point of contact with God, is made in His image; and three, that the world and all that is in it means so much to its Creator. These three assertions emerge from the Creation story in Genesis I as its essentially important points.”

Continuing, Neil writes: “Now, of course, the priestly composer of this chapter had no special information about the creation of the world, but he had, from the experience of his nation’s history, come to these conclusions about the God whom his people had learned to know. For us it is immaterial that these conclusions are embedded in a mythological framework that has much in common with the Babylonian Creation-myth. What is important is that right at the outset of the Bible we are invited to believe that the world is not an accident, and not in the hands of a blind purposeless Fate, nor yet that it is an impersonal evolutionary process, but that it is created and controlled by the same Power whose nature and acts are subsequently to be related.”³⁰

Modern theologians (and we are using the word “modern” to denote a school of theology, not in the temporal sense) are, on the one hand, like Neil, violently opposed to the literal, historical interpretation of the Biblical account of creation. On the other hand, they attempt to find some religious value in these stories. This they designate as the eternal (they may even call it “divine”) truth that, they claim, the author tried to convey in a mythological setting.

We have heard William Neil. Let us hear a few others who are representative of the thinking in the world of modern theological scholarship.

The name of Dietrich Bonhoeffer was mentioned earlier. In the winter semester of 1932–1933 this scholar, who is reported to have lost his life at the hands of Hitler’s henchman, Heinrich Himmler,³¹ delivered a series of lectures at the University of Berlin. These lectures have been published in book form. Their title is *Creation and Fall—A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1–3*.

Bonhoeffer’s “theological interpretation” begins by ridiculing the scientific knowledge of the author of Genesis. Concerning Genesis 1:6–10 he writes, “Here we have before us the ancient world picture in all its scientific *naivete*.” Apparently somewhat startled himself by his audacity, he continues, “While it would not be advisable to be too mocking and self-assured, in view of the rapid changes in our own knowledge of nature, undoubtedly in this passage the biblical author stands exposed with all the limitations of the age in which he

²⁸ *Ibid.* p.84.

²⁹ *Ibid.* p. 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 120-121.

³¹ Cf. a review of Bonhoeffer’s book by Edward J. Young in *Christianity Today*, Jan. 4, 1960, p. 35.

lived. The heavens and the seas were not formed in the way he says. We would not escape a very bad conscience if we committed ourselves to any such statement.”³²

Bonhoeffer, we see, is guilty of rationalism at its baldest. Like the serpent he makes bold to contradict God’s Word. “The heavens and the seas were not formed in the way he says,” is his charge against the divinely inspired writer, Moses. To all such self-appointed authorities God puts the question, “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding!”³³

Speaking of how the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, Bonhoeffer writes, “Here everything takes place in a very earthly way. The language is extremely childlike, and shocking for those who want to “understand,” to know anything... The anthropomorphisms become more intolerable: God forming and shaping the clay, and man shaped like a vessel out of a clod of earth. This can surely not produce any knowledge about the origin of man! *To be sure, as a narrative this story is just as irrelevant or meaningful as any other myth of creation.*” (Our emphasis)³⁴ Yet he maintains that the language of Genesis has a capacity as the Word of God.³⁵ He sees in this story an expression of the Creator’s bodily nearness to the creature: “his concern, his thought for me, his design for me, his nearness to me.”³⁶ He believes that this story also teaches a second truth: God’s authority, “the absolute superiority in which he shapes and creates me, in which I am his creature; the fatherliness in which he creates me and in which I worship him.”³⁷

This is an example of demythologizing the Biblical account of creation. In some respects it is similar to the various symbolical interpretations of scholastic theology. While it is true that Luther himself frequently offered an allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, he did so with this difference that he invariably began with a literal interpretation. Luther never questioned the historicity of the Genesis account, though he often found additional symbolical meanings in the words. He was highly critical of the fanciful flights of allegory so prevalent in the exegesis of his day.

Modern theology regards the Genesis account as picture language. Bonhoeffer asks, “How should we speak of the young earth except in the language of fairy tales? ... Who can speak of these things except in pictures? Pictures are not lies: they denote things, they let the things that are meant shine through.”³⁸

Reviewing this book, Edward J. Young asks, “If the words of Genesis 1–3 are the language of myth and fairy tales, what conceivable warrant is there for saying that they also have a capacity as the Word of God? Do the Grecian myths have a capacity as the Word of God? Do the fables of Aesop? *Alice in Wonderland*?”³⁹

Another prominent German theologian, Gerhard von Rad, professor at Goettingen, has published an interpretation of the first twelve chapters of Genesis.⁴⁰ He maintains, “That we are dealing to a very great extent in these extremely old traditions with myths is a fact which can no longer be denied.”⁴¹ But then von Rad defines the term “myth” in such a way as to attempt to rescue the religious significance of the Bible stories to which he has attached this opprobrious label. He concedes that in the accepted sense of the term a “myth” designates “a product of poetic fantasy, and as such has at best a broken or even no relation to historical reality.”⁴² He maintains, however, that myths deal with historical matters and, antedating a period of historical writing, preserving a people’s recollection of its history in a more exact form than written history does, being closer in time to the actual event than a subsequent historian who undertakes to write a history of the

³² *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

³³ Job 38:4

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 44.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.* p. 44.

³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 44.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 47.

³⁹ *Christianity Today*, Jan. 4, 1960, p. 35.

⁴⁰ *Das Erste Buch Mose, Genesis, Kapitel 1-12*, 9, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Goettingen, 1953.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p. 23. our translation.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 23. Our translation.

occurrence. Mythology, von Rad claims, is actually on a higher plane than history since it transmits a people's intellectual and spiritual interpretation of their experiences.

Just what term is to be used in describing the nature of the account in Genesis I and II is the subject of a lively debate among modern theologians. Karl Barth in his *Kirchliche Dogmatik* attempts to differentiate *Mythus* (myth), *Sage* (folklore), *Maerchen* (fable), *Legende* (legend), and *Anekdote* (anecdotes), the difference between *Mythus* and *Sage* being that *Sage* has an actual historical, or *pre* historical, event as its basis, whereas *Mythus* is purely a product of the imagination.⁴³

Barth writes. "The Biblical creation account is ... pure folklore (*reine Sage*)"⁴⁴ Denying that Genesis I and II is factual history, Barth adds, "Here it is to be noted that one must rid oneself, particularly in the Christian congregation, of the notion that the Bible speaks the true Word of God only if it speaks historically."⁴⁵

John Skinner of the College of the Presbyterian Church of England, Cambridge, England, expresses a similar thought when he writes, "One of the strangest theological prepossessions is that which identifies revealed truth with matter-of-fact accuracy either in science or in history."⁴⁶ His views are essentially those of a large segment of the modern school of theology when he asserts, "As a vehicle of religious ideas, poetic narrative possesses obvious advantages over literal history; and the spirit of religion, deeply implanted in the heart of a people, will so permeate and fashion its legendary lore as to make it a plastic expression of the imperishable truths which have come to it through its experience of God."⁴⁷ Skinner maintains, "The legendary aspect of the Genesis traditions appears in such characteristics as these: 1) The narratives are the literary deposit of an oral tradition which, if it rests on any substratum of historical fact, must have been carried down through many centuries... 2) The literary quality of the narratives stamps them as products of the artistic imagination. (!) ... 3) The subject-matter of the tradition is of the kind congenial to the folk-tale all the world over, and altogether different from transactions on the stage of history... 4) The final test—though to anyone who has learned to appreciate the spirit of the narratives it must seem almost brutal to apply—is the hard matter-of-fact test of self-consistency and credibility... With respect to the origin of the world, the antiquity of man on the earth, the distribution and relations of peoples, the beginnings of civilization, etc., its statements are at variance with the scientific knowledge of our time; and no person of educated intelligence accepts them in their plain natural sense."⁴⁸ In the opinion of this gentleman we who do accept the Genesis-account in its plain, natural sense are therefore not "of educated intelligence." Eternity will reveal who is right.

Again and again modern theology attempts to link the Biblical account of creation with the Babylonian myth called *Enuma elish*.⁴⁹ This myth explains the origin of the earth as the result of a fierce struggle between two hostile primeval deities. Marduk is said to have slain Tiamat, the mother of the gods in the Babylonian pantheon. Her body was divided into two parts and used in the "creation" of heaven and earth. Much, yes, too much is made of the fact that the name Tiamat sounds something like *tehom*, the deep of Genesis 1:2. That there are certain similarities between the two accounts is readily apparent. Both, for example, refer to the existence of light and to the alternation of day and night before the creation of the heavenly bodies.

Alexander Heidel, now deceased but formerly at the University of Chicago, wrote a little book in 1942 entitled *The Babylonian Genesis*⁵⁰ in which he discusses at length the relationship between Genesis and the

⁴³ Vol. III, pp. 88 and 91 (Evangelischer Verlag Ag. Zollikon, Zurich, 1947.)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 89.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 89.

⁴⁶ *Genesis*, (*International Critical Commentary*), New York, 1910. p. V.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. V.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. V-VII.

⁴⁹ Cf. John Skinner, *op. cit.*, p. IX, "The discovery of the Babylonian versions of the Creation and Deluge traditions has put it beyond reasonable doubt that these are the originals from which the Biblical accounts have been derived." This *Entlehnung aus Babylon* theory is shown to be untenable by Eduard Koenig in his Genesis commentary, pp. 99 and 183.

⁵⁰ The University of Chicago Press

Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma elish* (named from its first words meaning, “When above”). While there are some remarkable similarities, there are also a great many striking differences between the two accounts.⁵¹

The date for the composition of *Enuma elish* has been set on good grounds during the time Babylon rose to supremacy under the First Babylonian Dynasty (2057–1758 B.C.). We are familiar with the name of the energetic king Hammurabi (*about* 1900 B.C.) from this period. It was also during this time that Marduk became the Babylonian national god. *Enuma elish* therefore antedates the writing of Genesis by several centuries.

Heidel writes, “There no doubt is a relation between the two stories. But, if so, what is this relation that the one account bears to the other? Three main possibilities have been suggested: first, the Babylonians borrowed from the Hebrew account; second, the Hebrews borrowed from the Babylonian; third, the two stories revert to a common fountain head.”⁵²

The first explanation, the Babylonians borrowed from Genesis, is chronologically impossible. Concerning the second explanation Heidel holds that while it is not “incompatible with the doctrine of verbal inspiration to assume that Genesis 1:1–2:3 might in a measure be dependent on *Enuma elish*,” since Moses could very well have used whatever sources and traditions were available to him, “the idea that the biblical account gradually *evolved* out of the Babylonian” must be rejected. “The differences,” he says, “are far too great and the similarities far too insignificant. In the light of the differences, the similarities fade away almost like the stars before the sun.”⁵³

Let us hear what Heidel has to say concerning these differences: “*Enuma elish* refers to a multitude of divinities emanating from the elementary world-matter; the universe has its origin in the generation of numerous gods and goddesses personifying cosmic spaces or forces in nature, and in the orderly and purposeful arrangement of pre-existent matter; the world is not *created* in the biblical sense of the term but *fashioned* after the manner of human craftsmen; as for man, he is created with the blood of a deity that might well be called a devil among the gods. In Genesis 1:1–2:3, on the other hand, there stands at the very beginning *one* God, who is not co-united and co-existent with an eternal world matter and who does not first develop Himself into a series of separate deities but who creates matter out of nothing and exists independently of all cosmic matter and remains *one* God to the end. Here the world is created by the sovereign *word* of the Lord, without recourse to all sorts of external means. The Lord speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. Add to this the doctrine that man was created in the image of a holy and righteous God, to be lord of the earth, the air, and the sea, and we have a number of differences between *Enuma elish* and Genesis 1:1–2:3 that make all similarities shrink into insignificance.”⁵⁴

Let it be said right now that we have no doubt whatsoever that whatever parallels there are between the Biblical and the Babylonian accounts of creation are due to the fact that even among the Babylonians, polytheists that they were, remnants of the truth concerning the origin of the earth persisted, though in a fragmentary and corrupted form. Ira M. Price, formerly professor of Semitic languages and literatures at the University of Chicago, in his book, *The Monuments and the Old Testament*, writes, “Most of the great nations

⁵¹ Note the parallelism in the sequence of the various elements of the story in the following table prepared by Heidel to show the similarities in the two accounts (p. 108):

<i>Enuma Elish</i>	Genesis
Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal.	Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it.
Primeval chaos; Tiamat enveloped in darkness.	The earth a desolate waste, and darkness covers the deep (<i>tehom</i>).
Light emanates from the gods.	Light is created.
The firmament is created.	The firmament is created.
Dry land is created.	Dry land is created.
The luminaries are created.	The luminaries are created.
Man is created.	Man is created.
The gods rest and celebrate.	The Lord rests and sanctifies the seventh day.

⁵² *Op. cit.*, p.108.

⁵³ *Ibid.* pp. 116-117.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 117-118.

of antiquity have preserved legends or traditions of the creation of the world, of the origin of man, of the fall, and of the deluge.”⁵⁵

Another term that is met frequently in modern Old Testament theology is the word *Heilsgeschichte*. This is a beautiful word. Our fathers used it often when speaking about God’s eternal plan of salvation as it was fulfilled in His gracious dealing with sinful mankind, namely, that “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”⁵⁶ This plan of salvation, conceived before the foundations of the world were laid, was carried out when God in the fullness of the time “sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.”⁵⁷ In this sense God’s *Heilsgeschichte* spans the entire history of the world. It extends from creation with man’s subsequent fall into sin and God’s announcement of the protevangel in Eden, through the divine economy of the Old Testament, culminating in the redemptive work of Christ, including His active obedience to the Law as well as His vicarious suffering and death, His triumphant resurrection and ascension, and ultimately achieving its goal at Christ’s second coming and the final judgment with the entrance of the believers in Christ into the kingdom of glory prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This divine plan of grace Paul calls “the mystery of His will . . . that in the fullness of time He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth.”⁵⁸

This beautiful word, *Heilsgeschichte*, so descriptive of God’s love and mercy and grace, has been given an altogether different meaning in modern Old Testament theology.

A distinction is made between the two German words *Historie* and *Geschichte*. *Historie* is used as the equivalent of what we usually speak of as history. The word *Geschichte* also means history and is sometimes used as a synonym for *Historie*. But in modern theology *Geschichte* is often employed to designate some other realm, as that which is above history. In this sense Karl Barth says, for example, that the resurrection of Christ is true, but it belongs to the realm of *Geschichte*. He thinks it “should not necessarily be thought of as following chronologically the death of Christ. It is not, therefore, to be understood as an historical event, in the sense in which the term has been hitherto employed.”⁵⁹ So also the story of creation and the story of the Fall are said to belong to the realm of *Heilsgeschichte*, meaning that the events which they describe are not events which took place here upon this earth but rather events which belong to the spiritual world.⁶⁰ They are said to be parables, or types. They are termed *Urgeschichte*. They are said to be supra-historical, belonging to the realm of faith, or to the realm of redemption, or to the realm where scientific research is of no avail.

With penetrating insight Edward J. Young remarks, “Whatever be the precise connotation of these and kindred terms, it is perfectly clear that some advocates of what today is called *Heilsgeschichte* do not regard the Fall as an historical event. In this attitude toward the Fall they are thus at variance with the Apostle Paul and also, it may be noted, with Jesus Christ Himself.”⁶¹

As men like Albrecht Alt, Gerhard von Rad, and Martin Noth use the term *Heilsgeschichte*, it means the “Israelite construction of its own past” which for them is different from “Israel’s factual history as it is reconstructed today.”⁶² *Heilsgeschichte* is used to designate Israel’s spiritual interpretation of its history, an interpretation developed in accordance with a definite theological picture.⁶³

Along similar lines, G. Ernest Wright, professor at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, wrote a book in 1950 called *God Who Acts*, with a sub-title, *Biblical Theology as Recital*.⁶⁴ Enlarging on the thesis of men like von Rad who regard the Old Testament as *Heilsgeschichte* in their sense of the term, Wright sees in all

⁵⁵ Philadelphia, 1925, p. 98. Cf. examples in Skinner, *Genesis*; pp. 41ff.

⁵⁶ II Corinthians 5:19

⁵⁷ Galatians 4:4,5

⁵⁸ Ephesians 1:10

⁵⁹ Edward J. Young, *The Story of Old Testament Theology Today*, p. 19.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 19.

⁶² James M. Robinson, *The Historical Question*, in *The Christian Century*, October 21, 1959, p. 1208.

⁶³ Young, *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ London, 1956

of Scripture not the Word of God as such but a recital of God's acts in history. "The lore of the Old Testament," he says, "was a proclamation of a *kerygma*, of the great saving acts of God which brought Israel into being, in the light of which the subsequent history of the nation was compiled."⁶⁵

His opinion of our approach to the Scriptures is revealed when he writes, "The Christian Church—especially those communions of the Church which trace their lineage to the Reformation—speaks of the Bible as 'the Word of God.' Yet when this phrase is interpreted to mean that the center of the Bible is a series of divinely given teachings, then it is certainly a misconception and its use a disservice."⁶⁶

Wright's view finally amounts to this that the Bible is a *human* record of God's acts as men have interpreted them from their observations. He speaks of "Biblical theology as recital" because it is his contention, "at the centre of Biblical theology is a confession of faith of a particular type. ... The Bible relates a certain history in a confessional manner, because the recounting of this history is the central religious act of the worshipping community. Hence it is here maintained that Biblical theology is *the confessional recital of the redemptive acts of God* in a particular history, because history is the chief medium of revelation."⁶⁷

Another facet of the modern approach to Genesis is well exemplified in a little volume published in 1957 called *In the Beginning God* by William M. Logan, a Presbyterian pastor in Texas. Logan maintains that we must read the early chapters of Genesis "not as a chronological, astronomical, geological, biological statement, but as a moral and spiritual conception."⁶⁸ "These stories throb," he says, "with a message that only our spiritual hearing can detect. They are parables, not history or explanations." He considers them to be "poetic imagery and symbolism." "Their aim," he says, "is to awaken in man an awareness of his existence in the presence of God and of his utter dependence upon God. The stories are told in such a manner that when I read them, I realize that I am not reading an account of history; I am looking in a mirror! This is not Adam I am reading about; this is myself."⁶⁹

Logan's is the existentialist approach, the "divine-human encounter" theology of which Emil Brunner is a leading exponent. Brunner of Zürich, Switzerland, in the preface to the second volume of his *Dogmatics*, entitled *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, expresses his conviction "that sound criticism and genuine Christian thinking are not incompatible."⁷⁰ That has, of course, always been the guiding principle of the Reformed branch of the Christian Church, ever since the days when Zwingli placed reason above revelation in his interpretation of the Lord's Supper.

Brunner continues, "Those members of the Church who passively accept what they have been taught as 'revealed truth' seem to be unaware of the fact that their view of 'faith' is hampered by an age-long tradition which has misunderstood the meaning of 'faith,' regarding it not as 'encounter' with the living Christ, but as acceptance of 'revealed truths.'"⁷¹

What Brunner apparently fails to realize is that Christ encounters me only in and through His Word (and Sacraments, the visible Word), and that when I have found Christ in the Scriptures, I will with a joyful heart confess, "Thy Word is truth,"⁷² whether that Word is speaking to me about salvation by grace through faith, or about the origin of the world, the life-span of Adam, or the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus.

Brunner was greatly influenced by Karl Barth, the Basel prophet of the theology of crisis. Later, however, Brunner parted company with Barth. J. L. Neve summarizes Barth's position in this way: "Barth holds the Fall to be not a historical incident but a super-historical verity."⁷³ According to Barth "revelation is something super-historical and trans-historical. Historical facts are nothing more than parables and

⁶⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* p. 13.

⁶⁸ William M. Logan, *In the Beginning God*, Richmond, VA, 1957, p. 15.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 15-16.

⁷⁰ Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics*, Vol. II, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, Lutterworth Press, London, 1952, translation by Olive Wyon, p. V.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. V

⁷² John 17:17

⁷³ J.L. Neve, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. II, Philadelphia, 1946, p. 175.

demonstrations of the divine.”⁷⁴ His conception of the Fall “involves the simultaneity on the part of every individual! We are not separated from the Fall by generations preceding us, but every moment of time stands in an immediate relation to it.”⁷⁵

For Barth, Brunner, and all the rest of the moderns the theories of evolution are assured facts. They are very much embarrassed by the position taken by theologians of the preceding generation. In the controversy between theologians and scientists concerning evolution, they feel that the theologians came out second best. So they proceed to remove the grounds for conflict by interpreting the Genesis account in such a way as to accommodate it to evolutionary theory.

Here are some statements from Brunner’s *Dogmatics* which clearly indicate the approach of modern theology: “The Old Testament story of creation gives us the story of God’s creation in connection with a definite picture of space, of time, and still more definitely, of the beginning of all forms of life which have ever been and are unalterable. At all three points the position of modern knowledge forces us to abandon the view and replace it by other ideas.”⁷⁶ The Bible “tells the story of Creation with the aid of conceptions which, without ceasing to be vessels of divine revelation, are such that their intellectual outlook is in conflict with modern knowledge.”⁷⁷

“We would be well advised,” according to Brunner, “once for all to abandon the contemptible habit of taking refuge behind the hypothetical character of these results (of scientific research)—this dirty trick (!) of a lazy apologetic—and to acknowledge the results of scientific research which all scholars accept because they are based upon proof, and to admit that they are obligatory also for us.”⁷⁸

How do men like Brunner resolve the conflict between Scripture and “the assured results of scientific investigation”? They distinguish between the *narrative* of the creation in the Old Testament and the *truth* of the Biblical account. For us this is an impossible distinction. For there is not a syllable in all the rest of Holy Scripture to indicate that Genesis I and II is anything but historical narrative. Yes, the testimony of the entire Bible is to the effect that the creation account is pure history, the first chapters of divine *Heilsgeschichte* in the traditional, soteriological sense.

Brunner tries, however, to show by means of an analogy how the scientific theory of evolution can be combined with the Christian belief in creation: “How can we combine the chemical analysis of a painted canvas with the aesthetic judgment of this canvas as a work of art? Obviously the two are not mutually exclusive, because the two subjects are on different planes. While the chemist sees only the various elements of a chemical mixture, the artist sees a significant whole, an expression of mind and spirit... Just as the judgment of the art critic does not question the analysis of the chemist, but on the contrary, presupposes it, without bothering about details ... so the conviction of the Christian believer is not shaken by the scientific description of the scientist; without troubling himself about details he takes it for granted. The Creation is the invisible background of Evolution; Evolution is the visible foreground of Creation. Faith alone grasps the invisible aspect; science grasps this visible aspect. Evolution is the mechanism of creation; creation is the spiritual source and Final Cause of Evolution.”⁷⁹

These remarks by Brunner have already led us over to the second part of our discussion: Can the Biblical record of creation be harmonized with modern evolutionary theory and with so-called “assured results” of scientific investigation?

II

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 175.

⁷⁵ *Op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 31.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 28.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 33.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* p. 40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40

Two exegetical problems are of crucial importance in answering this question. The theory of evolution requires, and, we are told, the results of scientific investigation prove that the world must be millions and millions of years old. According to Brunner, “Modern science gives the age of the earth—which again is only one fragment of the age of the world of the fixed stars—as some milliards (billions) of years, and the age of the human race as some 200,000 to 500,000 years.”⁸⁰ Does the Bible permit us to think of the age of the earth in terms such as these?

The attempt to accommodate Genesis 1 and 2 to this theory has proceeded along two lines. Either the first two verses of Genesis 1 have been interpreted in such a way as to make room for a long, a very long period of time between the original creation and God’s work in the rest of the chapter, or the word “day” has been interpreted in the sense of “period” or “age.”

We shall discuss these points a little later on, but first of all let us hear how modern science comes to its “assured” conclusion that the earth is from four and one half to six billion years old. It should be stated at the outset that scientists do not agree among themselves on the age of the earth or of man as an inhabitant of the earth.

Formerly scientists attempted to estimate geologic time on the basis of the rate at which landforms were denuded, or according to the rate at which the salinity of the oceans was increasing, and other similar processes. None of these methods was reliable, however, because scientists could not be certain that the process had proceeded at the same rate back through the ages. Harrison Brown, writing in the *Scientific American* (April, 1957), states, “Before the discovery of radioactivity, estimates of the age of the earth and of the solar system were little better than guesses.”⁸¹

For a time many present-day scientists believed, as Brown indicates, that radioactivity furnished the key to an accurate estimate of the age of the earth. Radioactivity is a process by which certain elements give off rays and particles and are thereby changed into other elements, called decay products or daughter elements. Uranium, for example, decays to form helium and lead. Using the rate of radioactive decay, which is known, scientists can compute the time required for a given amount of uranium to form a given amount of lead. They call the rate of decay the half-life of the element. It is the time required for half the amount of the parent element to change into the daughter element. The half-life of Uranium 238 is 4,510 millions of years. According to this method the age of the earth is estimated to be 4½ billion years.

Other scientists have pointed out flaws in this method. If, for instance, the rate of decay were faster when the universe was young, the results would be erroneous. For the assumption is that the rate of radioactive decay has always remained constant. Another assumption is that none of the daughter elements or intermediate stages was present in the rock originally. If this second assumption is faulty, it would then also lead to erroneously high figures for the age of the earth. Russian scientists have, in fact, reported finding rocks that contained more helium than could possibly have come from the radioactive decay of uranium.

Another consideration which should not be overlooked is, I believe, the possibility that God may very well have created the earth with these processes not beginning, as it were, from scratch, but, so to speak, *in medias res*, even as, I am sure, the light from distant stars which are said to be thousands of light years away did not have to travel for thousands of years before those stars were visible on the earth. Rather, we may very well believe that those stars gave light upon the earth at once, though the light that left them on the fourth day of creation may not yet have reached the earth, if present theories of light are correct. As a result of Einstein’s work modern science has begun to realize that we do not understand very much about time and its effects. According to Zimmermann, “One of the implications of Einstein’s theories is that time is slowed when objects, either men, clocks, or atomic particles travel at a speed close to that of light.”⁸² He points out that the implications of this on computations of the age of the earth are tremendous.

The radiocarbon dating method, developed by the American physicist, W. F. Libby, has served to reduce materially previous estimates of the age of the earth. Radioactive Carbon-14, produced by cosmic rays entering

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 32

⁸¹ Quoted in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*, Edited by Paul A. Zimmermann, St. Louis, 1959, p. 146

⁸² *Op. cit.*, p. 154

the upper atmosphere of the earth, is taken in by living plants and animals. When a plant or animal dies, it no longer absorbs Carbon-14. But the C-14 in its structure continues to disintegrate. The radioactivity of the carbon can be measured, and so the age of the tree or fossil can be estimated. This method too is based on certain assumptions that cannot be proved. It is assumed, for example, that the C-14 in the dead animal or plant has not been increased or reduced by chemical exchange with its environment. This is an assumption that is highly questionable. Equally unproved and improvable is the assumption that cosmic rays have been forming C-14 at the same rate through the years. The radiocarbon dating method has, however, been tested successfully on a number of materials of a known age, like a redwood tree whose tree rings indicate that it began its life in 979 B.C. Of primary interest to us, however, is the fact that this newest attempt at scientific determination of the age of living things on the earth has forced scientists to conclude that certain geological processes do not take nearly so long as they previously assumed.

Our confidence in the Scriptures is, of course, not in the least dependent on the so-called “assured results” of scientific investigation. We are certain that if there does appear to be a conflict between science and the Scriptures, it is science that is in error, not the Word of God. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away,” our Savior tells us.⁸³ It is well for us to be aware, however, of how uncertain and changeable the “assured results” of science are, and of the unproved and improvable assumptions on which these results are based.

But it is saddening to note how some theologians wrest the Scriptures in an attempt to bring them into harmony with the dicta of science. We have heard statements by Emil Brunner, whose position is representative. Others like Skinner make no attempt to harmonize the two. For him, “The facts of science are not in dispute; the only question is whether the language of Genesis will bear the construction which the harmonizing scientists find it necessary to put upon it.”⁸⁴ To him, “It is a world unknown to science whose origin is here described—the world of antique imagination.” Men like Skinner consider it altogether impossible to harmonize the Genesis account with science. For them science, not the Bible, presents a true picture of the universe.

We must recognize, however, that in frankly taking such a position these theologians have shown how impossible the exegesis of the compromising harmonists is when they, for example, interpret *MwQ*(day) as a geological period of thousands of years and attempt to justify this interpretation by a reference to Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, that “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.”

Although Karl Barth, as we have previously seen, considers the Biblical account to be legendary (*Sage*), he shows that the meaning of “day” as the Biblical writer uses it can be nothing different from the ordinary day of twenty-four hours that we know. He considers the fact that the day is marked off by evening and morning as conclusive evidence for this, as indeed it is. Taking issue with Delitzsch, he writes, “One can only distort the entire picture, only turn it into a terrible confusion which can actually teach us little, if one introduced here instead of the clear concept day an undefined, very great period of time—in the apologetic interest of including in the picture all kinds astronomical and geological periods of millions of years.” Justly Barth scored Delitzsch for speaking of the literal interpretation of the word “day” as a “puerile and altogether silly idea.”⁸⁵

Eduard Koenig in his commentary on Genesis (1919) summarizes the reasons for interpreting the word “day” in the ordinary sense as follows: “a) In 1:5a a light and a dark part are specifically differentiated in the total concept, ‘day,’ b) In vs. 5b, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 the terminations of the two parts referred to are positively named. c) Furthermore, in vs. 16 the days are viewed as being ruled by the sun and moon respectively. Accordingly the author has ascribed a light and a dark portion to the six days of creation also. Consequently, the author was speaking of *ordinary* days.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Matthew 24:35

⁸⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 5

⁸⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 139

⁸⁶ Ed. Koenig, *Genesis*, Guetersloh, 1919, p. 168

John W. Klotz, professor at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois, in his book, *Genes, Genesis, and Evolution*,⁸⁷ has an entire chapter on the subject, “The days of creation and the age of the earth.” He writes, “It is a general principle of Biblical interpretation that a word is to be taken in its everyday meaning unless there is compelling evidence that it must be taken in a different sense. So in Genesis 2:4 it is very clear from the text itself that the word ‘day’ here means a period of time longer than twenty-four hours. And that is also true of the other passages of Scripture where the word ‘day’ clearly refers to a long period of time. But there is nothing in the text or context of Genesis I that indicates that these were long periods of time. Sound principles of Biblical interpretation require that we accept this ‘day’ as being an ordinary day.”⁸⁸

Klotz, too, refers to the repetition of evening and morning and observes that it “would almost indicate that God anticipated some of the controversies of our day and that He wanted to make it clear that the creation days were ordinary days.”⁸⁹

Decisive for us is also what we read in Exodus 20:11. God gives Israel the command to rest on the seventh day, and reference is made to the fact that “in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.” As Klotz points out, “This statement clearly implies that the days of creation were ordinary days and that God rested on the seventh *day* rather than on the seventh era, for the Jews were required to rest for a day and not for an era.”⁹⁰

Taking a similar position, Raymond F. Surburg, professor at Concordia Teachers College, Seward, Nebraska, in the book, *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*, previously referred to, lists seven reasons why the days mentioned in connection with God’s creative activity were not long periods but ordinary 24-hour days. In addition to the reasons we have already mentioned he also lists these: “The Hebrew dictionaries of Buhl, Brown, Briggs, Driver, and Koenig do not record the interpretation of *yom* in the hexaemeron as a long period of time. When in the Old Testament *yom* is associated with a definite numeral, solar days are meant (Gen. 7:11; 8:14; 17:12; Exod. 12:6, and numerous other passages). The wording of the Genesis account seems to indicate a short time for the creative acts described. To illustrate, in Gen. 1:11 God literally commands, ‘Earth, sprout sprouts!’ Immediately v. 12 records the prompt response to the command: ‘The earth caused the plants to go out.’ The Genesis account nowhere even hints that eons or periods of time are involved. Instantaneous action seems to be what the writer stresses.”⁹¹

Finally, we should not overlook the fact that when Jesus in Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6 speaks about the creation of the man and the woman, He asserts that God “*at the beginning* made them male and female.” He does not say that God made them thousands or millions of years after the formless and void earth had been called into being.⁹²

Although it is hardly conceivable that anyone would understand the word *yom* in any other sense than an ordinary day if it were not for the fact that some try to reconcile Genesis with evolutionary theory, it is ironic that even seven thousand or seven million years would not be enough to satisfy the evolutionist. He needs even more time. And besides, the order of events in Genesis I does not at all conform to the evolutionary scheme or to geological theory. George M. Price, professor of geology at Union College, Nebraska, has ably demonstrated that the modern school of geology completely misreads the available evidence in the interest of evolutionary theory.⁹³ We wholeheartedly endorse Leupold’s view therefore that “history, anthropology, Old Testament

⁸⁷ St. Louis, 1955

⁸⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 87

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 88

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 89

⁹¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 59-60

⁹² According to Otto Sohn in his column, *What’s the Answer* in the *Lutheran Witness*, Oct. 17, 1961, p. 15, “The word (Hebrew for day) is used 1,152 times by the Old Testament writers. Moses uses it 344 times in his five books (the Pentateuch) and five times in Psalm 90. In the Book of Genesis, which begins with the creation story, he employs it 65 times. Thirty-four times in Genesis occurs in such phrases as ‘the day, this day, on this day, today, day of death, day of distress’; 17 times it occurs with numbers: one day, the first day, the second day, etc.; nine times the term signifies the daytime in contrast with the night; in five cases it appears to be used in the more general sense of time. In no case does Moses use to denote a longer period.”

⁹³ Cf. G.M. Price, *The Phantom of Organic Evolution*, New York, 1924.

studies and many other sciences have been derailed and mired by the same attempt” to “coordinate the actual findings of geology with an evolutionistic conception of what geology should be.”⁹⁴

Another place in the Genesis account where an attempt is made to make room for a long period of time is in the first two verses of Chapter I. For the following summary of the various views regarding these verses I am indebted to Surburg’s chapter in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*.

According to some Genesis 1:1 (“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”) is a superscription or title for the whole following narrative.⁹⁵ This is precluded, however, by the Hebrew text because the conjunction *vav* joins verse I to the narrative that follows. It should also be noted that if verse I were a mere heading, there would be no account in Genesis I of the creation of matter as such, and furthermore, nothing would be said at all about the creation of the heavens if verse I is not accepted as stating it.

The King James translation of Genesis 1:1 is the same as that of the *British Revised Version*, the *American Standard Version*, the *Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text* (Jewish Publication Society of America) and the *Revised Standard Version*.

Adam Clarke translates it this way: “God in the beginning created the substance of the heavens and the substance of the earth.” This means that the first step in creation was to bring matter into existence in its chaotic state.

Grammatically, the translations of Meek and Moffat are possible, but they are not probable. Both of these men treat verse 1 as a subordinate clause. Meek’s translation reads: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was a desolate waste, with darkness covering the abyss and a tempestuous wind raging over the surface of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light.’”⁹⁶ Meek combines verse 1 with verse 3 and treats verse 2 as a parenthetical remark. Dr. James Moffat translates these verses in such a way as to leave out the original creation of matter: “When God began to form the universe, the world was void and vacant, darkness lay over the abyss; but the spirit of God was hovering over the waters, and God said, ‘Let there be light, and there was light!’”⁹⁷

It seems to me to be very clear that in verse I Moses is answering the fundamental question: What was the origin of all things? His answer is that God created everything. Time too had its beginning with Genesis 1:1. “The heaven and the earth” means the universe. “The heavens” (*Myha#Pa*) does not merely mean the sky, which was created on the second day, but as Bavinck defines it, “the firmament and the air and the clouds (Genesis 1:8, 20), the stars constituting the host of heaven (Deuteronomy 4:19 and Psalm 8:3), and also the third heaven, or the heaven of heavens, which is the dwelling place of God and of the angels.”⁹⁸

So we have in Genesis I and II three different creations described: “1) In 1:1 Moses sets forth *cosmic* creation, in 1:2—2:4a, the terrestrial creation, the fashioning of the planet called earth, and in 2:4—24 a detailed discussion of the creation of the parents of the human race, Adam and Eve.”⁹⁹

Having told us of the creation of the entire universe, “the heavens and the earth,” in verse 1, Moses leaves the subject of the heavens and goes on to set forth in detail the particulars concerning the earth: “And now, so far as the earth is concerned, it was waste and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering upon the face of the waters.”¹⁰⁰

A very popular interpretation among Fundamentalists is the so-called gap theory. This theory, also called the restitution or restoration theory, was set forth in detail in the 19th century by George H. Pember in his

⁹⁴ H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, Columbus, Ohio, 1942, p. 58

⁹⁵ So Edmond Jacob (University of Strasborg) in *Theology of the Old Testament*, Harper Bros., New York, 1958, translated by Heathcote and Allcock.

⁹⁶ *The Bible, An American Translation*, Chicago, 1931

⁹⁷ Cf. Heidel, *op. cit.*, p. 80, “The translations which take v. 1 as a temporal clause yield good sense, but they militate against all the ancient versions and the simplest and most natural interpretation of the Masoretic text.” His full discussion of this point is worth reading.

⁹⁸ Herman B. Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, (Erdmanns), Grand Rapids, 1956, p. 176, quoted in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*, p. 50

⁹⁹ Surburg, *op. cit.*, p. 50

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 51. apparently Surburg’s translation. Leupold’s is almost identical.

book *Earth's Earliest Ages*. Those who hold this theory believe that a long interval, anywhere from a few thousand to a few million years, intervened between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis I. Thus they find room for the vast ages required by geological theory. During this time, they also believe, the fall of Satan and the evil angels took place (II Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Rev. 12:7–9; Isa. 14:12–14). According to them, verse I tells of God's first and perfect creation. Because of the fall of Satan and his angels, this first creation was destroyed by God and turned into chaos. In accord with this view they translate verse 2 in this way: "Now the earth had become waste and wild (or formless and empty), and darkness was on the face of the deep."¹⁰¹ Then, after a period of undetermined length, they hold, God created the earth, making it a home for man in a week of solar days.

Some prominent theologians have accepted this interpretation, including Hengstenberg (a Lutheran, University of Berlin, 1802–189), Franz Delitzsch (professor of Old Testament at Erlangen, 1813–1890), J. H. Kurtz (professor at Dorpat, 1809–1890), and others. It is still propounded by dispensationalists today. The *Scofield Reference Bible*, for example, says, "Jer. 4:23–26; Isa. 24:1 and 45:18 clearly indicate that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as a result of a divine judgment. The face of the earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels."

A careful study of the passages referred to fails, however, to establish the gap theory. Furthermore, the verb *htfjh* means "was" not "became." The emphasis is on the predicates *Wb'w* and *Wb't*. The word *htfjh* is merely a copula. Leupold therefore says, "All attempts to put into this verb some thought like: the earth was there, or lay there for quite a time, are grammatically quite inadmissible."¹⁰²

Original matter was, therefore, in a state of chaos when it was created. And again, as with the hapless attempt to reconcile evolutionary theory with Genesis by interpreting days as eras, the gap theory also fails to accomplish this purpose because it has no explanation for the fossils in the various strata of rocks, unless there were also successive creations of animals followed by their mass destruction.¹⁰³

According to Scripture the creation of the original matter must have taken place within the six days. Luther says, "This primary matter, so to speak, for His later work, God, according to the plain words of the Decalog (Exod. 20:11), did not create outside the six days but at the beginning of the first day."¹⁰⁴

As it was created in the beginning, the earth was "waste and void." The Hebrew words are *Wb'w* and *Wb't*. The word *Wb't* means "unformed," indicating that the earth was not yet put into shape. *Wb'w* means "empty." Both words are actually nouns, used as emphatic adjectives ("unformedness" and "emptiness"). On the basis of Koenig's definition in his *Woerterbuch*, Leupold comments concerning *Wb't* that it "can come to mean 'waste' only in the sense of being not yet put into shape, not in the sense of having been laid waste by some catastrophe, as all those would postulate who try at every point to make room for geological periods of development."¹⁰⁵ *Wb'w* describes the earth as not yet being inhabited by beings of any kind. Neither of these terms is to be understood as implying any criticism of the results of God's primary creation, as if it were an unsatisfactory achievement. The terms simply describe the condition of the earth before the further creative activity of God organized it, beautified it, and filled it with living creatures.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 52

¹⁰² *Op. cit.*, p. 46

¹⁰³ Prof. Joh. P. Meyer has offered the following observation:

To meet the force of 'millions of years' suggested by the geological eras it may be well to point to three things:

- A. The absolute break between creation and preservation, Gen. 2:2. The laws of nature, in the general framework of which God carries on His work of preservation, were not yet operative during the period of creation.
- B. The catastrophe of the flood, during which certain laws of nature were 'suspended' (cp. Gen. 7:11 with 1:7), vividly described in Gen. 6–8.
- C. The curse pronounced by God after the Fall. The results are not fully described in Gen. 3:17–24, but the few hints stagger the imagination.

¹⁰⁴ *American Edition*; Vol. I, p. 6

¹⁰⁵ *Op. cit.*, p. 46

Modern theology has also expended a great deal of effort in discussing the meaning of the word “create.” Does the Hebrew word ברא imply a creation out of nothing? Taking note of verse 27 where we are told that “God created man,” and also taking into account that according to 2:7 God used the dust of the ground in creating man, we see that ברא can be used in the sense of “make,” utilizing previously existing materials. From this one dare not conclude, however, that previously existing materials are invariably present whenever the activity denoted by ברא takes place.¹⁰⁶

The specific connotation of ברא can be ascertained by noting that in contrast to other words meaning “to make,” the word ברא is used only of divine activity, never of human. Heidel writes, “*Bara* has about the same meaning as *asa*, with this difference, that *bara* contains the idea of a new, extraordinary, or ‘effortless production (such as befits the Almighty) by word or volition,’ (quoting Skinner, Genesis, p. 15), while *asa* is used in the general, colorless sense of ‘to do’ or ‘to make.’”¹⁰⁷ He asserts, “There is no conclusive evidence in the entire Old Testament that the verb itself (*bara*) ever expresses the idea of a creation out of nothing.”¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Heidel maintains—and rightly so—that Genesis I “predicates a creation out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), that is to say, it asserts that by the sovereign will and power of God matter was brought into existence from vacuous nothing at the creation of the universe.”¹⁰⁹ He finds that this doctrine “can be deduced from the expression בְּרֵאשִׁית in the beginning’ (Gen. 1:1), i.e., in the very beginning of things.”¹¹⁰ It can also be deduced from the words “heaven and earth.” For since this expression means “all things,” the existence of any primeval material is precluded.¹¹¹

The claim of those who, like Gerhard von Rad, find the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* in the word *bara* itself cannot, therefore, be maintained. Von Rad writes, “To express the concept of divine creation the Hebrew language supplied a verb, which, as the Phoenician (parallel) shows, could designate the creative work of an artist; but Old Testament usage precludes this comparison also: the verb is reserved exclusively to designate God’s creativity. This influence of theology on the use of language is significant... It is speaking about a creativity that is entirely without analogy. It is rightly said that the verb *bara*, ‘create,’ on the one hand, implies an absolute effortless, and on the other hand, inasmuch as it is never combined with a reference to the material, it implies the thought of a *creatio ex nihilo*.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁶ A. Heidel quotes with apparent approval the claim of Julian Morgenstern that ברא never takes the accusative of the material from which a thing is made, as do other verbs of making, but uses the accusative to designate the thing made” (*The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 76). Koenig’s comment (Genesis, p. 132) is pertinent, however: “It is simply not true that ‘with this verb a material is never named out of which that which has been created has been produced,’ (Ehrlich et. al.) because those who make this claim overlook God’s statement, ‘Behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy’ (Isa. 65:18b).” (Our translation.)

¹⁰⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 77. Heidel lists the following as synonyms of *bara*: “*asa* [אסא], ‘to do,’ ‘to make’ (Gen. 1:21–27; 5:2; Isa. 41:20; 43:7); *yatsar* [יצר] ‘to form.’ ‘to fashion’ (Isa. 43:1, 7; 45:7, 18; Amos 4:13); *konen* (כונן) (the *poell* of *kun*), ‘to set up,’ ‘to establish’ (Isa. 45:18), and of *yasad* (יָסַד), ‘to found’ (Ps. 89:12f).” Koenig (Genesis, p. 132) explains the meaning of the word ברא as follows: “Usage (Num. 16:30; Amos 4:13; Isa. 40:26; 41:20b; 48:6f., etc.) proves that the choice of this verb emphasizes first of all the divine and miraculous character of this activity, and secondly the amazing novelty of the result. The choice of the verb *bara* in 1:1 therefore indicates that the author wishes to assert that this is a fundamental, epoch-making act of the Deity.” (Our translation.)

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p. 76. Note also that the LXX translates Gen. 1:1 as follows: $\epsilon\theta\alpha\rho\chi\eta\epsilon\pi\omicron\iota\eta\sigma\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \omicron\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\eta\eta\ \gamma\eta\alpha$. The words $\kappa\tau\iota\zeta\omega$ and $\kappa\tau\iota\varsigma\iota$ which, like ברא describe a divine activity, are frequently used in both the LXX and the New Testament, but in 1:1, 26, 27 and 2:3 the neutral term $\pi\omicron\iota\epsilon\iota\omega$ is employed by the LXX.

¹⁰⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 76

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹¹¹ Delitzsch: “There is nothing belonging to the composition of the universe, either in material or form, which had an existence out of God prior to this divine act in the beginning.” Quoted in Keil’s commentary, p. 47.

¹¹² *Op. cit.*, p. 37. Our translation. This is also the conviction of A. Hoenecke, who says, “*Das Wort schaffen, creare, ברא* eigentlich *schneiden, dann formen, und dann schaffen*) bedeutet: etwas aus nichts hervorbringen.” (*Dogmatik*. Vol. II; Milwaukee, 1909, p. 212). Hoenecke holds that ברא means to fashion something out of existing materials (Latin: *facere*) and that in the creation account, where both are used, ברא is subordinate to עשה so that ברא defines the manner of *facere*. Von Rad’s assertion that ברא is never combined with a reference to the material” was refuted above.

While the expression, “*creatio ex nihilo*,” is actually derived from II Maccabees 7:28,¹¹³ the Scriptures give abundant testimony that God called the heaven and the earth into being without the use of preexisting material. The Psalmist says, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”¹¹⁴ Paul in Romans 4:17 tells us that God “callesh those things which be not as though they were.” The Book of Hebrews gives us the express statement that the visible things of the world were not created out of things that are visible: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”¹¹⁵ Creation from nothing, of course, is something that transcends our human comprehension. It can be apprehended *only by faith*.

We shall not here elaborate on the theory advanced by the philosopher, Henri Bergson, and enthusiastically endorsed by Emil Brunner¹¹⁶ of a creative evolution, which means that evolution is a “creative” process. Nor will we enlarge on the idea of others like DeWolf and Lever, who speak of a “theistic evolution,” or of “creation by evolution.”¹¹⁷ We most heartily endorse Prof. Surburg’s comment that “the system of hermeneutics that endeavors to accommodate Genesis II to evolution attacks the integrity and infallibility of the entire Bible and sets the church adrift upon a sea of doubt and uncertainty as to just what is God’s divine revelation and what is merely folklore.”¹¹⁸

Brunner sees an evolution in the Biblical doctrine of creation from the Old Testament to the New Testament. It is his view that the Biblical account of Creation had its origin in the mythology of Israel’s polytheistic neighbors. We note that he sees this influence also in the *method* of creation. Referring to the Psalmist’s description of the event, “He spake, and it was done” (33:9), Brunner comments, “This magnificent presentation of the *creatio ex nihilo*, or—and it is the same thing—creation ‘by the Word,’ is still faintly colored by a relic of the mythical idea of an original Chaos, an idea which in other passages of the Old Testament betrays still more clearly its polytheistic-mythical origin.”¹¹⁹ He sees a higher plane of religious thought in the New Testament where, according to him, “the last vestiges of any ideas which would impose limitations upon God have disappeared.”¹²⁰ According to him, the importance of the opening chapters of Genesis consists in their witness to the truth proclaimed by Christ that God is Lord. As Lord, He must also be Creator. These chapters do not, therefore, present a cosmogony. Their purpose, he claims, is to give not scientific but existential truth, the truth that the believer through faith in Christ existentially experiences that God is the Creator of the Universe.¹²¹

Conclusion

Although we do not subscribe to the theory of an evolution of religion in any form, it is nevertheless true that it pleased God to give men in the Scriptures a progressive revelation of His plan of salvation. He could, indeed, have given His completed revelation to man at one time. But in His wisdom He did not choose to do this. In the Old Testament we have, to use an analogy, the Gospel of God’s grace and love in the form of a beautiful rose bud. In the New Testament the bud is opened, and the fullness of its beauty is unfolded. In the New Testament we have God’s revelation by His Son, as the writer to the Hebrews puts it: “God, who at sundry

¹¹³ “Consider the heaven and the earth ... and know that God has not made them from existing things” (ouðe eoh̄twn epoihsen aūt̄a). Cf. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 43, footnote: “The reading presupposed by the Syriac version and the *Vulgate* was eoh̄twn which accentuates still further the creation *ex nihilo*.”

¹¹⁴ Psalm 33:6,9

¹¹⁵ Hebrews 11:3

¹¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 40-41. See George Patrick, *Introduction to Philosophy*, Cambridge, Mass., 1935, p. 150ff.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Darwin, *Evolution, and Creation*, p. 76.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77

¹¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 10. He refers to Ps. 74:13,14 and 104:6ff.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11

¹²¹ Cf. Surburg, *op. cit.*, p. 75

times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.”¹²²

There is then a difference not in the substance of what God said, but in the vehicles through whom He conveyed His revelation to men. In these last days we have a final, complete revelation in and through His Son. Before *this* revelation there was another, however, given through the prophets.

Although the revelation through His Son is complete and final, we should not look upon the earlier revelation as if it were inferior, or not sufficient for the salvation of men. Speaking of the Holy Scriptures that Timothy had learned from childhood, that is, the Old Testament, Paul says that they are able to make him “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”¹²³

In the first two chapters of Genesis we have the genesis of the history of God’s reign of saving grace among men. These chapters were not written, to be sure, to satisfy our curiosity about scientific matters, yet they nowhere conflict with true science. But they were written that we might learn to appreciate the goodness and love of our God, who created this world to be the home of man, and that we might learn to praise Him for His wondrous wisdom and almighty power. These chapters with their account of how God created man in His own image, of the Paradise into which God placed him, and of the two special trees which were in the Garden, are essential to an understanding of the Fall, through which man lost the image of God and forfeited his place in Paradise. They are essential to an understanding of the terrible curse that man’s fall into sin brought upon the entire creation. As a result of this curse “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,”¹²⁴ despite the fact that when it came from the hand of its Creator, “God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”¹²⁵ These chapters are essential to an understanding of the fact that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”¹²⁶ Adam is the father of the whole human race, even Eve being fashioned from a rib that the Lord God took from his side. As by the offense of the first Adam judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of the second Adam, which is Christ, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.¹²⁷ As God is the Creator of the first heaven and the first earth, which will pass away,¹²⁸ so He will also create “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”¹²⁹ And as in the Paradise of Eden there stood the tree of life, the way to which was barred after man’s sin by “Cherubims and a flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life,”¹³⁰ so in the midst of the Paradise of God there also stands another tree of life of which God will give to eat to him that overcometh.¹³¹

In these first chapters of Genesis God has through His prophet, Moses, therefore given us a divine revelation which is basic for our understanding of His *Heilsplan* and its subsequent execution, which is *Heilsgeschichte* in the proper sense of the term.

Pondering these chapters, may we never cease to give glory to Him who is our Maker and who is, above all, our Redeemer and Savior. Considering His work, the Psalmist, David, is moved to exclaim, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.”¹³² And Paul breaks forth in the doxology, “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are all things; to whom be glory forever!”¹³³

¹²² 1:1,2

¹²³ II Timothy 3:15

¹²⁴ Romans 8:22

¹²⁵ Genesis 1:31

¹²⁶ Acts 17:26

¹²⁷ Romans 5:18, 1 Corinthians 15:45

¹²⁸ Revelation 21:1

¹²⁹ II Peter 3:13

¹³⁰ Genesis 3:24

¹³¹ Revelation 2:7

¹³² Psalm 19:1

¹³³ Romans 11:36

Woe to those who dare to detract in any way from the glory and honor of the almighty God, who by His mighty Word and limitless power “callesh those things which be not as though they were”!¹³⁴ Let us not presume to call into question the Holy Word of our God and ascribe to blind chance what He tells us He created and upholds “by the Word of His power.”¹³⁵

This great God is the One who out of love for us, His fallen creatures, sent His Son to take upon Himself our human form in order that He might redeem us with His precious blood. Struck with wonder, David is moved to say, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him?”¹³⁶ May our hearts and lips, like David’s, ever be filled with wonder, love, and praise!

*Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation,
O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy Health and Salvation.
Join the full throng! Wake, harp and psalter and song,
Sound forth in glad adoration!*

¹³⁴ Romans 4:17

¹³⁵ Hebrews 1:3

¹³⁶ Psalm 8:3,4