

A DEFENSE OF SIX-DAY CREATION

I am now in my sixty-first year as a Reformed Pastor, and I am very much aware of the fact that I am not likely to have many more years of service. So, before the Lord calls me to come to his dwelling place I want to bear faithful witness concerning one of the foundational doctrines of the Bible. It is so foundational that it is the very first thing affirmed in the oldest creeds of the church: “*I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,*” and “*of all things visible and invisible.*” The Greek word translated in English as ‘maker’ is ποιητην. In Latin it is *creatorem*. And the Bible itself, before it says anything else, says “*in the beginning*” God “*created*” (Hebrew bara) “*the heavens and the earth.*” It also clearly says that he did so “*in the space of six days, and all very good.*” This doctrine of six day creation was also the consensus of the theologians, ministers and elders at the Westminster Assembly. And it’s my conviction that we in the Presbyterian and Reformed community of today have lost credibility with respect to this affirmation. We still *say* we believe every word of the Bible including what it says about creation. We also say that we subscribe to the Westminster Standards. But the truth is that we are no longer united in what we mean when we say this. And it is my conviction that this has seriously weakened our testimony to unbelievers.

I’m well aware of the fact that our tolerance of “day-age,” “analogical,” and “framework” views is seen by some as a very good thing. It shows that we are not stick-in-the-mud fundamentalists. And for this reason we can still be people who are respected by intellectuals and scientific people. We can even join with them in ridiculing people like Ken Ham for their attempts to uphold and defend a literal reading of the Genesis account of creation. I am willing to admit that at one time I felt attracted to this viewpoint. I also wanted to be respected. And there certainly have been aspects of fundamentalism that I disagree with. But when it comes to such a fundamental of the faith as the doctrine of creation, I am not ashamed to say that I have reached the point where, on this doctrine, I am more in harmony with *them* than with much of the material written by those who *reject* six-day creation. This is what troubles me. There seems to be more of a consensus in denial than in affirmation. There is much more said about what did *not* happen, than upon what *did* happen. I’ve read material over and over again, defending the day-age view of creation. I’ve also done so with respect to the analogical view and the framework view. And I cannot say that I have been able to clearly understand any of these three concepts. The one thing that’s seems clear in all three of these views is their rejection of the view that prevailed throughout the history of the church until the rise of the theory of evolution. I therefore want to state why I no longer believe that these negative views should ever have been tolerated.

My first reason is that I’m convinced that the Genesis account of creation was given by divine inspiration; given by the one true God who knows all things, and that it was designed to be clearly understood by his people through all generations. This is why it is not given in technical terms, or what we call scientific terms, but is stated in words that can be understood by the unlearned as well as the learned. And it *has* been understood by people in all walks of life to be true because God’s work of creation is described as a man would describe it had he been there to see it happen. Whenever I think about this I also think about some of the creation miracles of Jesus. They are described by men who witnessed these events. Jesus created wine one afternoon. On another day he created food for thousands. We know these things happened because we have the testimony of men who were there to see it happen. There is no need to invent theories to try to “help us understand what really happened” because they happened just as the Bible says they happened. And I believe it is the same with God’s work of creation. He has accommodated us by describing in words that an eye-witness would use had he been there during the six-days of creation. And there is no more reason to doubt what he says about how long it took (days not years, and certainly not ages) to happen. Like the rest of those early chapters of Genesis these early chapters also tell us what actually happened, and how long it took for it to happen. And we have no more right to question what it says — literally — than to question what happened with the miracles of Jesus.

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My second reason for affirming six-day creation is that I am not convinced of the finality or even the certainty of much present-day scientific thinking. I am far too simple to even begin to understand much of what these people are saying. But I've read enough to know that many times before in history people have thought that they had the answers. They thought Paul was a fool for going on about Jesus and the bodily resurrection. But again and again scientific (philosophic) thought has changed its positions. And I can see no reason to think that even the most advanced thinking of today will retain its dominion in coming generations. Only God knows all there is to know, and he has spoken to his people. He has said that it only took him six days to create the universe that we inhabit. And I do not believe that there is, or ever will be, any scientific discovery that will be able to discredit what God has spoken. Yes, scientific theories do appear to discredit that creation account. But be patient. In time it will be seen that those humble Bible believers were right: it *was* six-day creation.

Our fathers believed that the Bible was written in such a way that it is accessible to all of God's people. It is not a book that only the scholars can understand. No, it was written by divine inspiration to be clear to ordinary people. The Westminster Assembly of theologians, ministers, and elders was an assembly of men who were learned and brilliant. But they were not men who looked down on people like you and me as if we were ignorant fundamentalists. Here is what they said about people like you and I and understanding Scripture.

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. (WCF 1:7)

In my years as a Reformed Pastor I do not remember any older saints who doubted six-day creation. To the contrary, again and again, I've heard them affirm that this is their conviction. And I've also heard not a few of them say something like this: 'I believe in six-day creation, and I can't understand why these learned scholars have so much trouble accepting what God has so clearly stated.'

My third reason for affirming six-day creation is found in the principle stated by Jesus. He said that we can judge things "by their fruits" (Mt 7:16, 20). And the longer we have tolerated these other views the more the evidence has accumulated to show that the denial of six-day creation has been destructive. There are people who no doubt sincerely desire to be 'Reformed' who believe that we had better stop our opposition to evolution. But if evolution is accepted as true it means that death per se is not a result of sin but is to be thought of as normal. And what about Adam? Was there ever an individual by that name who stood there alone, before there was any other 'humanoid' — before there was even a woman? Or does the word Adam "really" refer to some tribal assembly or someone singled out of some tribal assembly, etc. The speculation taking place today is mind-boggling. And yet the whole structure of God's design for the history of mankind, according to the apostle Paul, can only be rightly understood as the (true) 'story' of *two* Adams. The literal, original, first-created man by that name, from whom all other human beings descended; and the literal, incarnate, Son of God who became a man in time and space in order to found a new human race through his work of redemption. In reading what I have been reading in recent years I see the kind of fruit that shows what our concessions have brought us. That the denial of the Westminster doctrine¹ is a bad thing is now confirmed by the fruit that it is producing. And I am persuaded that there is no greater or more urgent need in Presbyterian and Reformed Churches today than to get back to the faithful testimony of our Fathers.

¹ The Westminster Confession of Faith 4:1 "*It pleased God...to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days; and all very good.*" Larger Catechism Q/A 15 "*The work of creation is That wherein God did in the beginning, by the word of his power, make of nothing the world, and all things therein, within the space of six days, and all very good.*" Shorter Catechism Q/A 9 "*The work of creation is, God's making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.*"

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My fourth reason for affirming six-day creation is the good work of its present-day defenders. And here I will mention one who recently caught my attention. Dr. Jonathan Sarfati, Ph.D. was born in Victoria, Australia, but moved with his family to New Zealand as a child. He attended Wellington College in New Zealand, later graduating from Victoria University of Wellington with Honors in chemistry, earning a Ph.D. While in University Jonathan became a believer in Jesus through the witness of Christian students there, and as a consequence was driven to investigate his Jewish heritage. As a Messianic Jew, he became a passionate seeker of knowledge about church history and theological issues. He also became interested in the debate over creation and founded the Wellington Christian Apologetics Society in New Zealand. (He is also a national chess champion even achieving a draw against former world champion Boris Spassky in 1988). His writings on the subject of evolution and creation are some of the finest that I have seen. I also find the writings of Dr. John Byl — whose articles are often seen in *Christian Renewal* — very encouraging in their defense of six-day creation. Dr. Byl is a retired University Science Professor, and has served as an elder in a Canadian Reformed Church. Both of these men have shown that six day creation is capable of a vigorous defense. I have thought for some time that it is a pity that our Reformed Seminaries are failing to extricate us from the effects of the mistaken concession made by some truly great men in recent history, but I'm also heartened to see a clear stand being taken for six-day creation at Mid America Reformed Seminary — and even more since the Greenville Presbyterian Seminary has been willing to openly state its rejection of the concession of faith which has produced such bitter fruit.

When I was a seminary student I became concerned to understand what the well-known neo-orthodox theologians were saying. So I requested a special class for this since none was being offered at that time. Professor Addison Leitch agreed to provide this by assigning me reading in theologians such as Emil Brunner and Karl Barth. Well, I did my assigned reading faithfully, and then reported to Dr. Leitch. I told him that it gave me a headache because these men did not make sense in what they were saying. They talked about things being supra-historical, and about people being both elect and non-elect. And then I would read the straight-forward teaching of Calvin (and other great Reformers). I could understand them. They did make sense. So I came to the conclusion that God's truth, while not always easy to understand, does always make sense. It is something I can grasp well enough to then teach it to others. Well, I am sorry to say this, but when I read some of the long reports defending day-age, framework, or analogical views of creation, I get the same headache that I used to get reading the neo-orthodox theologians. They simply do not make sense. They do not make me say 'yes, that's it; that's what the inspired writer was getting at.' But that *is* the reaction I always have when I read what Dr. John Byl or Dr. Jonathan Sarfati write to explain what they believe the text of Genesis 1 and 2 is saying.

I am more and more convinced that what seminary professors, pastors, and elders need today is a good dose of Job and Ecclesiastes, because (if they did have that) they would again be able to teach and defend what the Westminster Standards say about creation. The Standards *say* that God created all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good. But in spite of what I would call some 'fancy footwork' by the adherents of these different views, what our standards clearly *say* is no longer what we *really* believe and uphold in all our OPC and PCA churches. And I believe the reason is that too many who profess adherence to the Westminster Standards have been seduced by the cultural consensus which says modern scientific people now know better than our Reformation fathers. They *think* that modern science has now made that part of our Reformation creed (taken in its obvious sense) obsolete. I believe they need to consider is what God said to Job many centuries ago.

Job asked in 11:⁷ "*Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? ⁸It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?*"
And again 38:⁴ "*Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. ⁵Who*

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determined its measurements—surely you know!

I take the last three words to be sarcastic! And the sarcasm was well deserved. You can see this from the response of Job who was deservedly chastened by it! 42:¹*Then Job answered the Lord and said:* ²*“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”* ³*‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.* ⁴*‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’* ⁵*I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you;* ⁶*therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”*

What Job needed to learn was the infinite difference between man (the mere creature) and his creator. And that being true it will never be the case that man knows enough to dispute what God says about his own work of creation.

Solomon said God *“made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end”* (Eccles. 3:11). Or again *“as you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything”* (11:5).

So here was Job’s conclusion: *“then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out”* (8:17).

Is it really true that the learned men of the 21st century have risen above this limitation? Is it really true that they now know enough to say it did *not* happen the way the inspired Moses says it happened, in Genesis 1 and 2? Scripture says *“Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight”* (Isa. 5:21). *“If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know”* (1 Cor. 8:2).

I am more and more convinced that many who think they are orthodox, and certainly intend to be, have nevertheless handled Genesis 1 and 2 in the same way the modernists handled other texts of the Scripture. This was not their intention. But it is the sad result. I therefore believe the time has come to simply say — loud and clear — *“the emperor has no clothes on.”* And one of the things that has driven me to this conclusion is what I learned from J. Gresham Machen:

The Bible has been in the world for nearly nineteen centuries and during all those centuries learned and truly devout men have been searching the Scriptures and have been endeavoring to summarize what the Scriptures teach.

It would be a very great mistake for a man who desires to present what the Bible teaches to neglect what the church has thought and done during all these centuries.

The collective wisdom of the church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, has found expression especially in the great Christian creeds.

Not only did the Reformers insist upon the authority of the Bible, but also, in their interpretation of the Bible, they agreed with much that had gone before. They maintained fully the truth of the great

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early creeds.²

We are living in a time of widespread intellectual as well as moral decadence, and the visible church has unfortunately not kept free from this decadence. Christian education has been sadly neglected; learning has been despised; and real meditation has become almost a lost art. For these reasons, and other still more important reasons, I think it is clear that ours is not a creed-making age. Intellectual and moral indolence like ours do not constitute the soil out of which great Christian creeds may be expected to grow.

But even if ours were a creed-making age, I doubt very much that the doctrinal advance which it or any future age might produce would be comparable to the advance which found expression in the great historic creeds. **I think it may well turn out that Christian doctrine in its great outlines, as set forth, for example, in the Westminster Confession of Faith, is now essentially complete.** There may be improvements in a statement here and there, in the interests of greater precision, but hardly any such great advance as that which was made, for example, at the time of Augustine or at the Reformation. **All the great central parts of the Biblical system of doctrine have already been studied by the church and set forth in great creeds.**

We need not be too much surprised to discover that that is the case. **The subject matter of Christian doctrine it must be remembered is fixed. It is found in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, to which nothing can be added.**

The truth is there can be no real progress unless there is something that is fixed. Archimedes said, “Give me a place to stand, and I will move the world.” Well, Christian doctrine provides that place to stand. Unless there be such a place to stand, all progress is an illusion. The very idea of progress implies something fixed. **There is no progress in a kaleidoscope.**³

That is the trouble with the boasted progress of our modern age. The Bible at the start was given up. Nothing was to be regarded as fixed. All truth was regarded as relative. What has been the result? I will tell you. An unparalleled decadence—liberty prostrate, slavery stalking almost unchecked through the earth, the achievements of centuries crumbling in the dust, sweetness and decency despised, all meaning regarded as having been taken away from human life. What is the remedy? I will tell you that too. A return to God's Word! We had science for the sake of science, and got the World War; we had art for art's sake, and got ugliness gone mad; we had man for the sake of man and got a world of robots—men made into machines. Is it not time for us to come to ourselves, like the prodigal in a far country? Is it not time for us to seek real progress by a return to the living God?⁴

Machen himself was tolerant of the day-age view of creation. But his own arguments stand in opposition to this tragic concession of faith. Indeed it is time to return to the living God by submitting to his word in the same way our reformation fathers did at the Westminster Assembly.

² These quotations are from *The Progress of Christian Doctrine*, in the January 10, 1940 issue of the Presbyterian Guardian.

³ A kaleidoscope is exactly what we have today in allowing a variety of views on the doctrine of creation.

⁴ These quotations are from *The Creeds and Doctrinal Advance*, in the February 10, 1940 issue of the Presbyterian Guardian.