

## HOW SHALL WE READ GENESIS 1?\*

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God's Word starts off with those impressive words, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." What a powerful and deep opening word of divine revelation! There is nothing else like this in the so-called "creation stories" of man's imagination. This is revelation! For that reason this opening verse continues to speak so directly to us today.

*"In the Beginning"*

"In the beginning. . . ." The context indicates that this is the very first beginning, the start of the world, when time itself began. Before this beginning, before creation, there was no time, only eternity. God was. He is eternal and His existence is here presupposed. We read in Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." God is without a beginning and without an end. We cannot understand eternity, for we are finite, created beings. We cannot reach out with our minds and comprehend the situation before time began.

When we read, "In the beginning. . ." in the first verse of Scripture, we can also think of the first verse of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning, was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." The Word is a designation of the second person of what we call the Trinity, namely, the Son. He was with God, the Father, in the beginning. The designation "God" often refers to the Father in the Old Testament and that is also the case here in Genesis 1:1. In the following verse we read about the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." So what do we have? We have here in the beginning the Triune God, active in the work of creation (cf., e.g., Heb. 1:10; Col. 1:16; Psalm 33:6; Isa. 40:12-14).

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### *"God Created"*

It is noteworthy that the subject of the Hebrew word for "create" is always God, and never a human being or a false god. God is the only one who creates. The context makes it clear that this work of the creation of heaven and earth did not consist of making something out of that which already was, but God brought into existence what did not exist. (In this connection, it is interesting, although not decisive for this understanding, that the verb "create" is never used with a preposition or accusative of the material from which God creates.)

Elsewhere, Scripture elaborates on this creation work of God which our Confession describes as creation "out of nothing" (Belgic Confession, Art. 12). We read in Psalm 33:9, "He spoke and it came to be. He commanded and it stood forth" (cf. v. 6). Similarly, Psalm 148, referring to the heavens, says, "He commanded, and they were created" (v.5; cf. Isa. 48:13). So God simply spoke the word and it came to pass.

### *"The heaven and the earth"*

In Hebrew, the word for "heaven" is always in the plural and therefore one can also translate the "heavens and the earth." The heaven(s) and the earth are the totality of creation. This is everything. "Heaven(s)" must therefore be understood in as broad a sense as possible. Even today, despite our twentieth century orientation, we, as creatures living on earth, think of the universe as "heaven and earth."

This phrase "heaven and earth" also points to the unity of creation. It is used everywhere in Scripture where the one creation work of God is referred to (e.g., Gen. 2:4; Psalm 12:2; 2 Peter 3:7,13). Although heaven and earth are clearly distinguished, yet there is a close bond between the two. Whether one thinks in the first place of the earth's atmosphere, or outer space or heaven as the dwelling place of God, it is true that whatever happens in the one has repercussions and is of importance for the other. This is of course especially true of heaven as the abode of God.

Although heaven also is part of God's creation, and is included in Genesis 1:1, this chapter does not further inform us of the creation of the angels or give any details about the place where God has His throne (cf. Psalm 14:2; 103:19). The concern of God's revelation in Genesis is the world in which we live and what is seen from it.

### *Some implications*

When one reflects on Genesis 1:1, it is obvious that this is a passage of great significance. One cannot overestimate that first verse, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth." This verse is foundational to so much. If we understand this verse and heed its message, its relevance becomes clear also in exposing and refuting certain false philosophies. Some important ones are the following:

Atheism, the belief that God does not exist, is refuted by this passage. Notice that the Word of God does not start with arguments for the existence of God. Scripture simply affirms it, "In the beginning, God. . . ." We do not need to prove God's existence. We may start from that fact.

Also polytheism, the view that there are many gods, is opposed by this passage. God (and not gods) created. One can think here of Isaiah 45:18. "For thus says the LORD who created the heavens (He is God!), who formed the earth and made it. . . I am the LORD and there is no other." Thus God said in the second word of the covenant: "You shall have no other gods before Me!" (Exod. 20:3).

Genesis 1:1 likewise leaves no room for materialism. This belief can be defined as holding that "physical matter is the only or fundamental reality and that all being and processes and phenomena can be explained as manifestations or results of matter" (Webster). Consistent materialism maintains that matter is eternal, and only what we can see, touch and handle is really important. The existence of God and the soul of man are denied by consistent materialists because these you can not see or touch. But the first verse of Scripture shows us that God alone is eternal and that He brought matter into being.

Pantheism is also refuted. This philosophy equates God with the laws and the forces of the universe. Indeed, all things are considered partakers of the one divine essence. Pantheistic thinking is sometimes evident from the manner in which battles for a better ecology and environment are fought (cf. the sacredness of the environment, etc.) and it is also basic to the growing "New Age Movement." But, God is clearly distinguished from creation in Genesis 1:1. He cannot be identified with creation in any way. The Creator stands above and beyond His handiwork.

It is obvious that Genesis 1:1 is a very important verse and a clear and correct understanding of it is crucial. But how does verse 1 relate to verse 2?

*Verses one and two*

The first two verses read, "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth. The earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" (RSV). How do those two statements—a statement about creation and a statement about the earth's being without form and void—relate to each other?

Traditionally, it has been explained this way. "The first verse serves as a broad, comprehensive statement of the fact of creation. Verse two describes the earth as it came from the hands of the Creator and as it existed at the time when God commanded the light to shine forth."<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:11 (part of the fourth commandment) informs us that "in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them." Genesis 1:2 is, therefore, part of the first day. It is also clear from the same passage that the beginning of the creation work of God (referred to in Gen. 1:1) was on that first day as well.

*The gap theory*

Early in the nineteenth century, a new interpretation was proposed, namely, the so-called gap theory. This theory was proposed under the pressures of the rise of modern science and the apparent necessity to harmonize what seemed to be the scientific truth with what Scripture is saying. In its barest essentials this theory postulates a large gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2. During this time gap the perfect creation of verse 1 was ruined, presumably by the fall of Satan. This ruined earth is pictured for us in verse 2, "The earth was without form and void." The conditions that are described in verse 2 were caused by God's judgment in the form of a flood followed by a global ice age when the light and the heat from the sun were somehow removed. All the fossils, be they of plants, animals or humans, which are found on the earth today date from that destructive time period. These fossils do not bear any genetic relationship with life as that is now found on the earth. Proponents of this gap theory "have almost uniformly appealed to it for the harmonization of huge quantities of time required by evolutionary scientists and the rather recent creation Genesis seems to present."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 14.

<sup>2</sup>W. W. Field, *Unformed and Unfilled* (Nutley, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1976), 8; see also 7.

With the first world ruined, a subsequent restoration was needed. This restoration we find recorded beginning with Genesis 1:3. What are the arguments for this gap theory? Because this theory is a rather popular theory, let us consider the arguments one by one and weigh each one as to its validity.<sup>3</sup>

The first argument for the gap theory that can be mentioned is that according to the defenders of this theory, the Hebrew verb "to create" must be rigidly separated from the Hebrew verb "to make." "To create" means to make from nothing, but "to make" never means that, but only refers to making something out of material that is already present. (The verb "to form" is also grouped with "to make" in this context.) It is then argued that in Genesis 1:1 we read, "In the beginning, God *created* heaven and earth," but that elsewhere it says: "In six days, the LORD *made* heaven and earth" (Exod. 20:11; also see Gen. 2:1-3). That is: God did not then call into being what did not exist, but He prepared the heavens and the earth from the material that was at hand. According to this argument, Genesis 1:1, therefore, describes a completely different event from that recounted in verses 3 and following. Genesis 1:1 does not speak of the work of God that is described in Genesis 1:3-2:3, but it relates to an earlier work of God, a world that had been *created* before the present world was *made* from the ruined first world.

The question arises, of course, whether such a rigid distinction can be made between "to create" and "to make" (and "to form"). The answer is no. Very briefly the evidence is as follows. Although it is true that the verb "to create" expresses better than any other word the idea of an absolute creation, a making from nothing, yet we should not drive a wedge or artificial division between "to create" and "to make." After all, both of these words are used of God's work with respect to the origin of this world. A good Reformed principle is to compare Scripture with Scripture. When this is done, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the statement, "God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1) and the statement, "The LORD made the heaven and the earth" (Exod. 20:11) both refer to the same event and not to two different events. The reason for this conclusion is that the verb "to create" and "to make" are used interchangeably in speaking of God's creation work.

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<sup>3</sup>For an extensive treatment of all the arguments, see Field, *Unformed, and Unfilled*, 51-146. What follows is in part indebted to this work.

This interchangeability can be demonstrated from Genesis 1 and 2. About the creation of man we read in Genesis 1:26, "Let us *make* man," but in the next verse it says, "God *created* man." Compare also: "the LORD God *formed* man" (Gen. 2:7). Although with the creation of man there are different connotations of the verbs used (cf. Gen. 2:7), there is an interchangeable usage. Similarly, we read, "God *created* the great sea monsters" (Gen. 1:26) and "God *made* the beasts of the earth" (Gen. 1:25). Here too the terms are used interchangeably. When God called the sea creatures into being (Gen. 1:20), He created (Gen. 1:21). When He called the creatures of the earth into being (Gen. 1:24), He made them (Gen. 1:25). This synonymous usage is also found in Genesis 2:4. "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were *created*, in the day when the Lord God *made* the heaven and the earth." Exactly the same event is referred to with these two different verbs. So, just from Genesis 1 and 2 it is already evident that "to make" and "to create" are used interchangeably. This can also be demonstrated from elsewhere in the Old Testament,<sup>4</sup> but let this suffice.

The other Old Testament passages that speak of creation must be interpreted in the light of this evidence. When, therefore, the fourth commandment speaks of God's making the heaven and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, this can only refer to what we read in Genesis 1:1-2:25. That is the only creation work that Scripture speaks of. And when Ezra said (as recorded in Neh. 9:6), "Thou art the LORD, Thou alone; Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them." then this too refers to that same creation work of God. There are not two creation works of God, namely Genesis 1:1 and then separate from that, what follows in Genesis 1 and 2.

A second argument that is used to plead for a time gap between the first two verses of Genesis is that verse 2 starts in the Hebrew with "and," representing, therefore, later sequential action. First what is described in verse 1 occurred, and then later what is described in verse 2. First God created the heaven and the earth, and then (according to this argument) verse 2 literally reads, "And the earth *became* without form and void." This rendering thus indicates that there is a time gap between these two verses.

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<sup>4</sup>Field, *Unformed and Unfilled*, 56-71.

In response, it should be noted that translating "and" is misreading the Hebrew.<sup>5</sup> According to Hebrew grammar, something that happened subsequently would be expressed with the order: "and" + verb + subject. That is the normal narrative order in a verbal clause. But here in Genesis 1:2, the order is "and" + subject + verb. This is the order used for circumstantial clauses. Such a clause describes the circumstance or the condition. In this case, verse 2 describes the earth as God originally created it. These were the circumstances and condition when God had called the earth into being and when He created light. Verse 2, therefore, does not describe how the earth became at some time after the creation of everything.

In light of the above, it is with very good reason that the Revised Standard Version leaves out "and" in its translation of this verse. In this way any wrong impression can be avoided, such as that something happened between verse 1 and verse 2. The New International Version translates: "Now the earth was formless and empty." This gets the explanatory sense of the Hebrew "and" across.

Connected with this treatment of "and" is the desire by gap theory adherents to translate "was" in verse 2 ("the earth was without form and void") by "became" or "had become." They translate: "The earth became (or had become) without form and void." In this way the idea of sequence in time is conveyed. However, such a translation is without any foundation. In circumstantial clauses the verb "to be" functions as a copula and is for that reason often omitted. Here it is in the text to stress how it was at the time of God's creation work of the first day.

A third argument for the time gap theory is that the expression "without form and void" has negative connotations of God's judgment. When verse 2 tells us that "the earth was without form and void," we can draw the conclusion that God judged the earth because of a preceding fall into sin. However, such a conclusion is unwarranted. The terms in question do not necessarily speak of God's wrath at all. The usage of these terms elsewhere makes that clear. The first word "without form" (תֵּהוֹמָה), although sometimes translated by "vanity" or "vain things" (e.g., 1 Sam. 12:21), literally means "emptiness" or "desolation." It is used of "a pathless waste," not formed into

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<sup>5</sup>For more precise and technical information on what follows, in popular terminology, see *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* edited and enlarged by E. Kautzsch, 2nd ed. rev. A.E. Cowley (1910, 1966), 156; P. Jouon, *Grammaire de l'hebreu biblique* (1923, 1982), 154.

hospitable territory (Job 12:24; Psalm 107:40). It pictures the loneliness and desolateness of a barren desert. This is also clear from the parallelism in Job 26:7. The first part reads: "He stretches out the north over the void [תהו];" the second part corresponds to this: "and hangs the earth upon nothing." It can therefore be concluded "that the meaning in Genesis 1:2 is that the earth was still devoid of all the countless living creatures which now occupy it in all of their colorful multiplicity. It was still one expanse of emptiness."<sup>6</sup>

The second expression in the pair "without form [תהו] and void [בְּרוּי]" occurs with the first word, תהו, only in the Old Testament (Gen. 1:2; Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23) and it is therefore difficult to evaluate separately. The usage of the term בְּרוּי appears to indicate that it is used to strengthen the meaning of the first word, תהו. The sense is that the earth was as empty and as desolate as it could be. A good translation, therefore, is "desolation and waste." At the beginning of the Lord's creation work the earth could not be inhabited. There is no mention of a fall of creation in the judgment of God or any implication that God had to do His work over again. We can think here of Isaiah 45:18: "For this is what the LORD says—He who created the heavens, He is God; He fashioned and made the earth. He founded it; He did not create it to be empty [תהו], but formed it to be inhabited. He says, I am the Lord and there is no other" (NIV). The emptiness and the desolation was only the first phase of God's work of creation. The rest of Genesis 1 will show us how God transformed that empty desolation into a world that was fully prepared to receive man.

A fourth (and for our purpose final) argument for the time gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 that can be noted concerns the reference to darkness in verse 2. It is said that this implies the presence of evil and judgment since darkness symbolizes sin and judgment in Scripture. (See, e.g., John 3:19, "And this is the judgment that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.") It is, therefore, supposed that God originally created the world in light and that the darkness resulted from the fall into sin and God's subsequent judgment.

However, just because darkness can symbolize evil does not make darkness itself a manifestation of evil. It does not make darkness inherently bad. God's Word teaches otherwise. Darkness is a very necessary part of the cycle of day and night, as God created it (Gen. 1:5; cf.

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<sup>6</sup>G. C. Aalders, *Genesis*, I; trans. by W. Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 54.



Psalm 104:20-24). Man needs the darkness to get his rest. It is beneficial for him.

In conclusion, there is no Scriptural basis for the theory that Genesis 1:2 describes the earth after it fell into God's judgment because of sin. What we read in verse 2 is simply the first stage in the preparation of the earth for man. "It is the first picture of the created world that the Bible gives. . . .The earth was desolation and waste, but all was in God's hand and under His control; nothing was contrary to His design."<sup>7</sup>

Genesis 1:1 is a broad statement of the creation of heaven and earth. Genesis 1:2-3 describe that first day of creation.

### *Genesis 1:2*

In this verse are three circumstantial clauses which describe the condition of the earth in the beginning after being created. These are the circumstances: a) the earth was "without form and void"; b) "darkness was upon the face of the deep"; and c) "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." We have already considered the meaning of the first clause, "without form and void." Let us now look briefly at the last two.

"Darkness was upon the face of the deep." There was no light. All was in darkness. The earth was covered with water. Psalm 104:6 refers to this. "Thou didst cover it [i.e., the earth] with the deep as with a garment; The waters stood above the mountains." The whole world was covered with water (cf. Gen. 1:6f., 9f.). Concerning God's setting the bounds for the water on the third day, we read in Psalm 104:9, ". . .that they [i.e., the waters] might not again cover the earth." The dominant place of water in the earth as first set forth also reminds us of 2 Peter 3:5, ". . .by the Word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water."

"The Spirit of God moving over the face of the waters." The earth was not yet inhabitable; but it was also not forsaken and left for what it was. God's Spirit moved over the face of the water. Literally, it says the Spirit hovered, like a bird can hover in care of what lies below it. This calls to mind the image of the LORD hovering over Israel, as an eagle taking care of her young (Deut. 32:11). The hovering of the Spirit of God over the deep shows that He is closely involved in the work of creation.

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<sup>7</sup>E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, 38.

The close involvement of the Spirit in the work of creating can also be seen in other passages of Scripture. Two examples can suffice. Psalm 33:6: "By the Word of the LORD the heavens were made and all their host by the breath of His mouth." Note that "the breath of His mouth," which is a literary way of speaking of the Spirit, is parallel with "the Word of the LORD." There is a close connection between the Spirit and the Word. The work of the Spirit in creating is also seen in Isaiah 40:12-13: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand? Who has marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance? Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD or as His counselor has instructed Him?"

Genesis 1:2 and Scripture elsewhere show that the Spirit participated in making creation ready for man. It can, therefore, be said that the Spirit's hovering over the face of the waters was not an empty meaningless gesture or a mere presence of the Spirit. Aalders put it this way: "an active power goes forth from the Spirit to the earth substance that has already been created. This activity has a direct relationship to God's creative work. Perhaps we can say that the Spirit preserves this created material and prepares it for the further creative activity of God, by which the disordered world would become a well-ordered whole, as the further creative acts unfold for our view in the rest of this chapter."<sup>8</sup>

Before we conclude our discussion of these two verses, there's a larger question that we need to look at, because it is constantly raised. The question is this: "What is the relationship of the Biblical account to the scientific study of origins?" What role should science have in trying to understand Genesis 1:1-2 and the verses that follow?

### *Bible and Science*

Many books and articles have been written on this subject. It is not my intention to go into all the aspects that undoubtedly deserve attention, but to set out some general guidelines of relating the two and understanding the relationship, so that justice is done to the Scriptures as well as the natural sciences.<sup>9</sup> There are four basic truths or principles that should be kept in mind.

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<sup>8</sup>Aalders, *Genesis*, I, 56.

<sup>9</sup>For what follows I am especially indebted to J. A. Van Delden, "Bijbel en Wetenschap" in his *Schepping en wetenschap* (1977), 48-59. See also A. Keizer, *Wetenschap in Bijbels licht*, 23-26.

In the first place: *The Word of God is clear or perspicuous*. This means that believers who read the Bible, are not dependent on specialists, be they in science or theology, in order to understand its basic message. When a child of God reads and studies Scripture, humbly submitting himself to the Word and asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then the Word is a light on his path, a lamp before his feet (Psalm 119:105). The Word does not have to become a light; it is that when we read the Scriptures with a mind open to the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers are able to judge and are even called upon to judge any interpretations of Scripture that are suspect (cf. 1 Cor. 2:15; 1 John 2:20). This clarity of Scripture does not imply that there are no difficulties in interpretation, or that there are no perplexing passages. It, therefore, also does not deny the need for the scholarly study of Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

In the second place, *God's Word is self-sufficient and self-authenticating*. It does not need our reasoning and proofs to show that it is trustworthy and true. As we confess in Article 5 of our Belgic Confession: "We believe without any doubt all things contained in them [i.e., the Holy Scriptures], not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves. For even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled."

In the third place, *God's Word explains itself and is its own interpreter*. Behind the many books of Scripture, there is only one Author and that's the LORD God. This means that there is a basic unity underlying all of Scripture. If we, therefore, have difficulty understanding one part, we can find out how the Bible elsewhere speaks about the matter that we may have difficulty with. We can use one part of Scripture to explain another part because God is the primary Author of Scripture. Thus, if there are problems in understanding parts of Genesis, then the relevant information found elsewhere in the Old Testament or the New Testament can and should be used.

Finally, *God's Word has the last say*. If there is a real contradiction between what man is saying and what God is clearly saying in His Word, God's Word must be maintained and the word of man must be put aside. These four truths or principles we should always keep in mind.

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<sup>10</sup>See further on this topic, e.g., H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, I (1967; this ed. first published 1906), 445-451.

All this brings us to a related topic: Is the Bible a scientific textbook? It is often said that the Bible is not a scientific textbook. This is true. We would be misusing Scripture to utilize it as if it were, for instance, a modern textbook on biology or physics. The Bible does not speak in a scientific way, but uses the language of everyday experience. This means, for instance, that when the Bible speaks of phenomena in space, it does so from an earthbound point of view. It uses geocentric language, that is, the language of everyday orientation for those who live on earth. For example, to say that Joshua's words, "Sun, stand still!" (Josh. 10:12) show that the sun rotated around the earth is proving too much. This is everyday language which we should not press. Today we who imagine that the sun is stationary still speak of sunrise and sunset, as if the sun is moving. We say, "What a beautiful sunset." We do not say, "What a beautiful turning of the earth!" We speak geocentrically, in the language of our daily experience. Similarly, we cannot prove that the world is round on the basis of Isaiah 40:22 which reads: "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth. . . ." Probably the circle refers to the horizon. Scripture speaks according to our geocentric orientation.

However, to deny that Scripture is a scientific textbook does not mean that it does not give us facts that need to be considered by scientists. Scripture certainly does! He who does not acknowledge and consider the contents of Scripture ignores facts. Also scientists need to consider the Biblical data, for they are true and they need to be considered also for scientific endeavors; facts such as creation, the fall into sin, and the worldwide flood. This is important information which has a bearing on science. Wherever the Bible touches upon topics of scientific interest it is reliable. The fact that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16) means that it can be trusted for whatever it teaches. The Bible can never function simply as a source of information. No, it stands in a class all by itself. It is normative, also for scientific endeavor.

Scripture must therefore provide the largest framework that the scientist works in. Although, scientists study certain "laws of nature," these laws can never be absolutized. Only God is sovereign. He created these so-called laws, and therefore, God can also break these laws whenever He pleases. For example, in geology a basic principle is that natural processes continue at a constant rate. If there's been a rate of sedimentation of so much over the last hundred years, well then, you can figure back according to the height of the sediment and say how old it is. That's how geology works. However, since God created and rules this world we can never absolutize and make autonomous the particular processes that are at work and the rate at which they operate. These

processes as such do not have the last say. Here is a Biblical example. In Deuteronomy 29, we read that God reminds His people that He had led them through the wilderness for forty years. According to the laws of nature and the processes we are familiar with, that would have meant that Israel would have gone through many clothes and sandals. The regular "wear and tear" of daily life would have seen to that. However, God said: "Your clothes have not worn out upon you and your sandals have not worn off your feet" (Deut. 29:5). God who alone is sovereign over-ruled those laws of nature with respect to "wear and tear" and He can do that whenever He pleases. We have to take that possibility into account.

For this reason, to take geology as an example, one can never simply assume that the present rate of a process (of erosion or rock formation) is the key to the past. No, it could be more complicated than that. One also needs to remember that in the beginning, God created everything with an unavoidable appearance of age. Adam and Eve were adults. They weren't 30 years old. They weren't even a day old when they had an appearance of maturity. There was an unavoidable appearance of age right at the beginning. One also has to remember the catastrophe of the world-wide flood which could also result in data appearing to be older than would have been the case under more uniform rates of erosion and sedimentation, etc. The point is: one needs to work with these Biblical data. Now, it is often said, "Well, God would have been acting deceptively if He had made things that looked older than they were." But God is not being deceptive by, for instance, creating man and the trees (bearing fruit!) with the appearance of age, for God has told us in His Word that He has done so!

The importance of taking full account of what the Word of God says when doing scientific work is underlined when one realizes that science can say nothing sure about origins. What is science? Science can only be sure about data and processes that can be reproduced and tested in the laboratory. Science, therefore, cannot say a wise word about the act of creation because it is not (in the strict sense of the term) a scientifically verifiable fact. That is beyond the competence of science.

Scripture never conflicts with facts. God does not contradict Himself in His book of creation and in His book of special revelation. We need to remember that if we are to understand rightly, we need to read the book of creation through the glasses of Scripture. The book of creation is not fully understandable without the book of special revelation. Why is that? That is because our minds have been darkened by sin and we cannot truly understand creation without the Bible.

Although there actually cannot be a conflict between the books of nature and revelation, conflict does arise when scientific theorizing is influenced by a denial of the Word of God. The theory of evolution, along with all the presuppositions that inform it, is a good example of this. Conflict between the books of creation and special revelation can also arise if Scripture is wrongly understood. If one insists that Scripture does not allow you to believe that the earth revolves around the sun instead of vice-versa, then one goes further than Scripture. (Think of the seventeenth-century struggles surrounding Galileo.) However, although mistakes in understanding Scripture have occurred and are still possible today, we should not now relativize all interpretation of Scripture, but we should be careful that we do not go further than Scripture does. Christian endeavors in science, carried out on the basis of Biblical presuppositions and within a Scriptural world view, can never come into conflict with the Bible. Secularized science can. "But then you have a conflict, not between science and faith, but between unbelief and faith."<sup>11</sup>

One's understanding of Scripture must never be subservient to the condition that it has to fit the current scientific theory. Faith must never be put over against rationalism as if it is some kind of a contest. Scripture has the first and the last say. We accept Scripture in faith and do not need any "proofs" from history, theology, science, or any other discipline that it is true. After all, science is only the human effort of trying to understand God's creation. Science, therefore, has a very modest place and its theories are only that and nothing more.<sup>12</sup>

This last point can be underscored by listening to the words of some well-known scientists.<sup>13</sup> Karl Popper noted: "We keep in science getting a more and more sophisticated view of our ignorance." In a similar vein, F.A. Hayek is quoted as saying: "It is high time that we take our ignorance more seriously. We have indeed in many fields learned enough to know that we cannot know all that we would have to know for a full explanation of the phenomena." And finally R.A. Alberti, Dean of the School of Science at M.I.T., said: "The more we know about the universe, in a way the more we do not know about it. . . . Every time a scientist makes a discovery, he realizes there are ten more things he doesn't know."

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<sup>11</sup>Van Delden, "Bijbel en wetenschap," 57.

<sup>12</sup>On the above, see John Byl, "Science and Christian Knowledge," *Reformed Perspective*, 2:6 (1983), 4-9.

<sup>13</sup>The following quotes have been noted by L. De Koster in *Christian Renewal*, 5:14 (Apr. 13, 1987), 19.