

CREATION *OR* EVOLUTION?

Gise Van Baren

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About the Heritage Collection

The Heritage Collection consists of pamphlets on various subjects that were written by Protestant Reformed ministers from approximately the 1930s to the 1970s. At first they were printed and distributed as small plain covered pamphlets by the First Protestant Reformed Church Sunday School. Eventually, the printing was taken over by the church's evangelism society and their appearance was updated.

Background information on most of these pamphlets is sketchy. Some were written in response, occasionally fiery, to doctrinal struggles that took place at particular times. Often they were first delivered in lecture form and then printed to facilitate wider distribution. The earlier authors are in glory; the later ones are retired ministers.

Characteristics of the pamphlets are that they are solidly Reformed and Scripturally based – many abound in Scriptural proof texts – and, given the limited amount of space in pamphlets, provide a comprehensive overview and perspective on their topics. They are often not light reading, but taking the time to read them, study them, and savor the many insights they provide can be conducive to spiritual growth.

The writing of many of the pamphlets was sparked by debates decades ago, but the issues they address are still relevant for readers today. These issues always need to be clarified for those encountering the Christian faith for the first time and for each new generation of believers. Some of the more involved pamphlets may be of greatest benefit to believers who already have a background in the Scriptures.

It is our hope that these voices from a past era may continue to bless readers in the future as they have in many previous years.

Introduction

Rev. Gise Van Baren maintains that the real question that Christians must ask when wondering about the origin of the universe is, “What does God tell us about the origin of all things?” And, to answer that, we need to go to God’s own creation account in Genesis 1. Scripture is the infallible Word of God and is decisive for every part of life, including the area of science.

This pamphlet uses as its basis God’s teaching that He created the universe in six literal 24 hour days. It explains why it is vital to maintain this teaching and also how it is possible to maintain it. A clear biblical perspective is provided here for Christians seeking answers to questions on origins.

Rev. Van Baren has served as a minister of the gospel in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America since 1956.

This pamphlet is a 2011 reprint of the original work.

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The Problem of Origins

Evolution is considered by well-nigh everyone as an accepted fact. It is part of science textbooks. It is a presupposition that finds its way into history books. One cannot enter a museum of natural history, he cannot tour the national parks, without encountering the theory of evolution. I suppose that there is a good explanation for this. Rebellious man, who denies God and His sovereign power to form and direct all things, will devise a theory that explains origins apart from the power of the Almighty God. This I can understand—though it must be strongly condemned.

However, what is extremely disappointing, nay even disgusting, is that large numbers of those in positions of leadership within what is called the church have adopted and openly teach the theory of evolution—with the minor modification of including God somewhat in their idea of evolution. These maintain the same ancient dates, the same processes of development and change as does the evolutionist, but they insist that God begins and directs the evolutionary processes. I realize that such men give evolution an aura of respectability from a religious standpoint—and their presentation seems completely sincere and pious.

Claims are made: God could as well create all things over a period of billions of years instead of in six literal days. It is said that whatever one's view of origins might be, whether theistic evolution or 24-hour creation days, one's belief does not affect his faith in Christ and the work of atonement. It is said that Scripture is no science textbook, and that God also reveals Himself in the book of creation—a revelation that points to long ages of development and evolution. Now it is true that there is an element of fact in some of these contentions—but since these contentions are only partially

true, I believe them to be so extremely dangerous. These are deliberately misleading statements that can only deceive the unstable. The question is not what God could have done, nor is the question whether Scripture is a science textbook. Nor is it entirely true that one's view of origins does not affect his understanding of the atonement.

In this pamphlet, I will consider the true origin of the universe. This I intend to do not on the basis of the discoveries in the various sciences. I do not intend to present scientific arguments as rebuttal to the theory of evolution. I am not qualified to do this, though I am convinced that it could be done—and some Christian scientists have attempted to do this.

The source of my information concerning origins is Genesis 1. It is true that this account of Genesis is not meant to be a scientific treatise; it is not a science textbook. However, Genesis 1, together with all of Scripture, is the infallible Word of God. Though it is not a textbook on science, what is presented is the inspired Word of God. It is, therefore, decisive when speaking on matters that also concern science. The question is: What does God tell us in Genesis 1 concerning the origin of all things? Simply and briefly, it is that God created the heavens and the earth with their contents in six days limited by evening and morning.

The Day of Genesis 1

There are those today who strive to fit in the revelation of God in Genesis 1 with the theory of evolution. Various suggestions are made. It has been said that the “days” of Genesis 1 are in reality each long periods of millions of years. It has likewise been maintained that Genesis 1 represents a manner of speech, a framework, a common presentation of origins among peoples who lived four or five thousand years ago through which God attempted to describe what we now have come to recognize as theistic evolution. The “days” of Genesis 1 were not “days” at all—though the author of Genesis may have thought so at the time.

Any who refuse to go along with one of these theories of interpretation of Genesis 1, to harmonize it with evolution, are immediately relegated to that class of people who still believe that the earth is flat on the basis of erroneous interpretations of Scripture; or with those who formerly thought that the sun revolves about the earth.

I am not entering into these various theories of interpretation—except to show that Genesis 1 allows for but one interpretation: the days of creation were literally 24 hours. There can, therefore, be no evolution, theistic or otherwise, as this is taught today.

Genesis 1 speaks plainly of the days of creation. We read, “And the evening and the morning were the *first day*” (verse 5). The same is said distinctly of the remaining five days. Now some have pointed out that the word “day” in Scripture does not always refer to an ordinary day as we think of it. Genesis 2:4 is mentioned as well as Joel 2:31, 2 Peter 3:8, and others. In the last mentioned passage, the apostle writes, “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” It must be conceded that the word “day” in Scripture does not always refer to an ordinary day. That is self-evident. However, let it be noted that the word “day” appears more than 2,000 times in Scripture—and in the vast majority of instances it refers to an ordinary day. It follows, therefore, that in any particular passage of Scripture the word “day” ought to be interpreted in its ordinary sense unless the context clearly indicates that this cannot be done. But then let it be emphasized: a different significance can be placed upon the word “day” not on the basis of scientific discoveries, but only on the basis of the context of the word in Scripture.

Second, it must be pointed out that in every other instance where a numeral precedes the word “day” in Scripture, it always is an ordinary day. If Scripture is consistent and logical, and it is, this must also be true of the days mentioned in Genesis 1.

Third, the word “evening” appears in Scripture some 60 times, and

the word “morning” some 219 times. In every instance, their usage is such that an ordinary evening and morning are meant. They have no other meaning in Scripture. When they are used in Genesis 1 to limit each day, they can there also be understood only in this usual sense—requiring us to interpret the word “day” as also an ordinary day of 24 hours.

Finally, Scripture throughout recognizes the creation week as an ordinary week, the basis of every week that follows. This is especially clear in Exodus 20:10, 11, where God commands that the Sabbath be observed, “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.”

I would maintain, therefore, that on the basis of Scripture itself there can be no other conclusion but that God created all things in six literal days of 24 hours each. Anyone who properly maintains the infallibility of Scripture must also agree. Scripture, though not a science textbook, means what it says and says what it means.

The Importance of Maintaining Genesis 1 Literally

Many have minimized the importance of the proper interpretation of Genesis 1. It has been stated that whatever view one might hold concerning the correct interpretation of Genesis 1, it does not affect one’s faith in Christ. I too believe that there may be those who are Christians holding to the atonement of the cross, but who nevertheless grossly misinterpret the first chapters of Genesis in order to fit them in with their theories of origins. However, I would insist that the argument is fallacious. The argument is given to minimize the importance of properly interpreting Genesis 1. As such, it is deceptive and misleading.

It is a question, first, of the infallibility and inspiration of Scripture

itself. Did God so direct and govern the writer of Genesis that what was written is God’s Word—and presented without error? Or, as is suggested, must one try to determine what the human author had in mind; must one try to determine what people believed in those bygone ages—in order to ascertain the basic truths of a passage of Scripture? Must one first strip from Scripture the “myths” and “misconceptions” of the writers (or, reinterpret these) in order to arrive at the truth that God would have us to know? I contend that such theories represent denials of the infallibility of Scripture. This is not a minor thing that cannot affect one’s belief in the atonement of the cross. One’s attitude toward and conception of Genesis 1 will ultimately affect his conception of all of Scripture.

Second, I would point out that there is no reason why the erroneous theories of interpretation applied to Genesis 1 cannot be applied to other portions of Scripture as well. These theories could be used to explain away, or deny, miracles. They could be used to place a different interpretation on the cross itself, ultimately. Why not?

Third, reinterpretation of the first chapters of Genesis necessarily leads to a denial of the historical Adam. Genesis becomes nothing more than an account of the rise of mankind (who is called “Adam” or dust) and his subsequent development. This is a denial that a literal Adam was the first father of all the human race and its God-appointed representative head. This is a denial of original sin and its consequences upon the posterity of Adam. This is a denial of the clear teachings of Romans 5, which speaks of one representative head through whom all men have sinned. Such denials also make it impossible to believe that Christ can be the proper representative Head of His people or that through Him they can be saved.

Finally, I point out that historically (and you can check this for yourself) there is a development from the point of reinterpretation (in reality: denial) of Genesis 1, to a point of questioning other historical accounts of Scripture, to a point of denying any or all of

the miracles of Scripture, to the ultimate conclusion of denying the blood atonement. Denial of the first chapters of Genesis in their literal sense is the first step toward open modernism or liberalism. This ought to impress upon us the seriousness of tampering with Genesis 1.

Scientific Proofs for Evolution

I well understand that there are problems that arise in connection with discoveries by men of science. There appear to be so many indications pointing to a universe whose age numbers in billions of years. The length of time it takes for light to arrive from distant stars seems to show this. The measurable rate of degeneration of radioactive materials apparently shows this. Connected with that, there is the yardstick of carbon-14. Then too there are discoveries in the fields of geology, paleontology, etc. All seem to give indications of an extremely old universe that developed to its present stage through the process of evolution. In other words, scientific discoveries seem to disprove the plain teachings of Genesis 1. Yet one makes a fundamental error were he to allow the theories of men to determine what Scripture says.

Erroneous Presuppositions

I do not intend to refute or explain the discoveries that seem perplexing in the light of Genesis 1. I would, however, suggest several lines that might indicate what proper answers are.

Those who maintain evolution, also a theistic evolution, make several fundamental errors. First of all, these refuse to recognize Scripture as being trustworthy revelation on origins. The universe itself must be the basis of their investigations and conclusions. Only after the conclusions are drawn and theories made does the theistic evolutionist seek to harmonize these discoveries with Scripture. Second, though their theories have very often been proved wrong in the past, yet today the theory of evolution is

maintained as though it were infallible. Why?

Third, the investigations that led to the theory of evolution over billions of years are based upon the presupposition of a certain uniformitarian principle. The investigator concludes that all things always have remained the same; the rules, laws, circumstances of today have continued unchanged from the hoary past into the present day. Already in the time of the apostle Peter, a similar error was made, for Peter writes in the second epistle, “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (3:3, 4). But the Word of God answers these scoffers by pointing out the error of their theory: “For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (3:5, 6). Finally, there is the error of refusing to recognize the part of faith. Creation can be demonstrated scientifically, but must be believed by faith (see Hebrews 11:3).

Three Important Scriptural Presuppositions

I would point out three scriptural, historical facts that disprove the theory of uniformitarianism; facts that go far toward explaining many of the discoveries that seem to point to a long time of evolutionary development.

There is the fact of creation. Scripture reveals that the universe was divinely created. It reveals further that this creation was good (Genesis 1:31). It also shows that this creation took place within six literal days (Genesis 1). The evolutionist ignores this; he tries rather to discover the origin of all things only through his investigations of the universe itself. This is a fatal error. The fact of

divine creation, as presented in the Genesis account, does indeed explain much concerning that which many scientists attribute to evolutionary development over billions of years.

Consider the following. The instruction not only of Genesis 1, but other passages in Scripture as well, points to the formation of the universe in a short span of time; the universe that was thus formed was complete. Psalm 33:9 states, “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.” Adam is formed as an adult—not as a babe. The trees and plants were called instantaneously into being. The same was true for all of this earth. At God’s Word, it was formed to be a proper dwelling-place for man. That which man needed for his existence and development, God placed in the earth. God “callesth those things which be not as though they were” (Romans 4:17b). That which came into being at the Word of God appeared as though it had been there for some time. Adam, though he had just been created, would have been judged by us to be a man of perhaps 25 years. The trees, though just created, would have been judged by us to be perhaps hundreds of years old. The earth, though just formed, would have been judged by our standards to be also rather old. Besides, this earth was as yet untouched by sin and the resultant curse of God. The original creation, therefore, must have been considerably different than that which we presently observe. The creative act of God and that original creation is necessarily beyond the scope of any possible scientific investigation by man. However, the scientist who ignores the scriptural revelation concerning this understandably comes with rather fantastic conclusions. For anyone who would ignore the reality of the original creation, where all things were perfect, will come to conclusions concerning origins that are necessarily invalid.

There is the fact of the fall into sin. This is presented in Genesis 3. The evolutionist, of course, will not take this into account either. Yet at that time a tremendous change must have taken place. At that time of man’s fall into sin, the creature came under the sentence of death. The earth itself was cursed for man’s sake. Sin

abounded and affected the whole of the creation. What a vast difference there must have been between the creation as originally formed, and the creation after God's curse and the sentence of death rested on it. One who ignores that event can only draw conclusions that are necessarily invalid.

There is the fact of the universal flood. The Genesis account presents a cataclysmic event that disrupted the whole of the earth. The fountains of the deep burst forth; the windows of heaven were opened. Together with the universal flood, there were likely also earthquakes, volcanoes, tidal waves, and related calamities. Many discoveries of today in the field of geology can be traced, likely, to this great event. One who ignores it can only draw wrong conclusions in his investigations concerning the origin of all things.

Therefore, the faithful child of God must continue to maintain the teachings of God's Word as presented in the Genesis account. He must not be swayed by theories of men—theories that deliberately omit God and His Word, or insert Him into the conclusions as an afterthought. God created the heavens and the earth and all that they contain in six literal days limited by evening and morning. God's Word says so. And I believe that Word is absolutely true.

Let Others Know

Let others know what you confess concerning origins – and why. More copies of this pamphlet can be ordered from the address on the following page. If you desire a more detailed explanation of the creation account, see Homer C. Hoeksema's book: *In the Beginning God...* This book, which is currently out of print, can be read at: www.prca.org/books/in_the_beginning_god.html.

The following pamphlets are also available upon request:

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