

The Interpretation of Genesis Chapter One
Faculty and Staff Christian Fellowship, 19 April 2006

- I. Early attempts to frame a hermeneutic for Genesis One
 - A. The Christian belief in God's two books of revelation: nature (general) and Scripture (special) (see Psalm 19)
 - B. Augustine (354-430), On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis
 1. His attempt to reconcile Greek natural philosophy (science) with Genesis 1
 2. His hermeneutical approach in cases of apparent conflict: If natural philosophers are not agreed on a controversial point of science, then Scripture should be accepted literally; if they are agreed, and appear to controvert Scripture, then Scripture ought to be interpreted figuratively.
 - C. Galileo (1564-1642), Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina
 1. Geocentricity: the interpretation of scriptural passages that seem to require a belief that Earth is the centre of the universe
 2. 'The Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go' (i.e., Scripture should never be cited as an authority in science).
 - D. John Calvin (1509-64)
 1. The principle of accommodation: God limits himself in divine revelation to human understanding by the use of phenomenological language of nature.
 2. In Genesis 1 Moses provides a popular (i.e., non-scientific) picture of Creation
- II. Debate over the age of the earth
 - A. Physico-geology (theories of the earth that weaved together science and biblical chronology)
 - B. Geological history in the 17th-18th c: diluvialism, catastrophism
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- III. Current issues
 - A. Distinction between primary (supernatural) and secondary (natural) causation. Does Genesis 1 intend to teach science or theology?
 - B. Does Scripture always require a literal interpretation? Dispensationalism (yes); historic Protestantism (no). Emphasis on accommodation is crucial here.
 - C. To what extent does Genesis 1 need to be harmonised with modern science?
 1. Examples of the gap theory; the day-age theory; the revelatory-day theory
 2. Concordism (the framework hypothesis): parallels in order of Creation
 3. Genesis 1 as a metaphorical account written for popular understanding that teaches theology, not science, and does not require harmonising with science.
 - D. Retrieving the Augustinian formula among evangelicals
 1. Do we permit scientific theories have some check on biblical interpretation? Augustine believed that doing so prevented the Bible from falling into disrepute when it appeared to contradict a scientifically-demonstrated proposition because God's two books of revelation must be in harmony.
 2. Protestant exegetes have since the 17th c. granted scientists the freedom to study nature without condemning their views as biblically unacceptable, which has encouraged scientific investigation (James Moore).

The Literary Genre of Genesis, Chapter One

Bruce K. Waltke

Preface

The creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3 needs desperately to be heard today in the social-science classroom as a viable option in the marketplace of world religions.¹ This biblical creation story provides the foundation for the biblical world and life views, its views about God, humans, the creation, and each other, truths that the Spirit uses to convict sinners of sin, righteousness, and judgment and to point to Jesus Christ as the Saviour. Biblical values and ethics are based on this account.

Unfortunately, instead of contending that its message be heard in the social science classroom as an option to the pagan worldviews that are coming more and more to the fore in our post-modern world, some Christians, led by "scientific creationists," are contending boisterously that it be taught in the hard science classroom. This is due to their conviction that the biblical story and scientific data must and can be harmonized. For most, however, the attempt to harmonize the scientific data with a straightforward reading of Genesis is not credible, and as a result the Bible's message is rejected as a viable option in the marketplace of competing world and life views.

Whether Genesis 1:1-2:3 should be taught in the social sciences or in the hard sciences depends on its literary genre. If it be a scientific and/or straightforward historical account, then it belongs in the latter; if not, then Christians should be contending that it be given a hearing in the former. In this paper I will attempt to identify its genre with the hope that it will encourage Christians, and especially Christian educators, to see that students again hear this famous

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story and rightly understand it in the classroom.

Genre identification depends on a text's contents and function. George Brooke² reasoned: "The determination of literary genres is assumed by most literate people most of the time; however, when the debate is heated, it is necessary to be precise lest we miss the writer's point, for genre and intention often go hand in hand." In light of the biblical text's literary genre, the reader will be in a better position to decide the compatibility or the incompatibility of this creation account with scientific theories of origin.

Part I: Its Purpose

An author's purpose is determined in part by his perception of his audience's need. Gen 1:1-2:3 was originally addressed to Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai c. 1400 B.C. Both Psalm 8, by David c. 1000 B.C., and Psalm 104, a polemic against the Hymn of Aton dated c. 1350 B.C., transform our prosaic narrative into poetry and set it to music. Empirical evidence confirms the tradition that our text goes back to Moses, the charismatic founder of Israel.³

Through Moses' mediation, Israel, after its Exodus from Egypt, entered into covenant with their Saviour, "the LORD," who promised to reward his faithful worshippers with life and threatened the disobedient with death. To undergird this covenant an inspired Moses gave Israel this creation story, allowing only one God, Creator of heaven and earth, who alone deserves worship, trust and obedience.

Pagan mythologies about the creation ever threatened to annihilate Israel's witness to ethical monotheism. Pantheism, not theism, universally informed their myths which demanded no moral rectitude. Believing in magic, their liturgical personnel annually mimed their myths hoping that by re-enacting the drama of their lustful gods they would re-create life. Their myths and rituals, such as Babylon's

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famous *Enuma Elish* with its dramatic rubrics, symbolized the world and life views that animated their pagan cultures. God's revelation annihilated them and revealed to Israel new and true symbols by which to live. John Stek⁴ argues:

His [the author of the Pentateuch] pen seemed to break the power of ages-old religious notion that still held many in thrall. He was not grappling with issues arising out of modern scientific attempts to understand the structure, forces, and dimensions (temporal and spatial) of the physical universe. He was not interested in the issues involved in the modern debate over cosmic and biological evolution.

Moses aimed to produce through a true understanding of God a right perception of the universe and humans, including their relationships to God and one another, and to proclaim that truth in the face of false religious notions dominant throughout the world of his day. Conrad Hyer⁵ notes:

In the light of this historical context it becomes clearer what Genesis I is undertaking and accomplishing: a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism *vis-à-vis* polytheism, syncretism and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principal categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but creatures--creations of the one true God who is the only one, without a second or third. Each day dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in a cosmological and symmetrical order.

On the first day the gods of light and darkness are dismissed. On the second day, the gods of sky and sea. On the third day, earth gods and gods of vegetation. On the fourth day, sun, moon and star gods. The fifth and sixth days take away any associations with divinity from the animal kingdom. And finally human existence, too, is emptied of any intrinsic divinity--while at the same time all human beings, from the greatest to the least, and not just pharaohs, kings and heroes, are granted a divine likeness and mediation.

The Genesis creation narrative gives the faithful a firm foundation for their covenant with God. Why have no other gods (Exod 20:3)? Because he alone is Maker of heaven and earth (Gen 1:1). Why not murder (Exod 20:13)? Because humans alone are created in his image (Gen 1:26-28). Why set apart a

day for rest (Ex 20:8-11)? Because he set it apart (Gen 2:2-3).

Our text continues to speak to the Christian Church, the new Israel, and to separate it on its journey through the "Wilderness" to the "Promised Land" from competing worldviews and values. On the one hand, it girds the pilgrim people against the myths of the Enlightenment: materialism (the philosophical theory that regards matter and its motions as constituting the universe, and all phenomena, including those of the mind, as due to material causes), secularism (the system of political or social philosophy that rejects all forms of religious faith and worship), and humanism (that system or mode of thought of action in which human interests, values, and dignity predominate). On the other hand, it also fortifies them against pagan New Ageism, which fails to distinguish adequately between the Creator and His creation and right from wrong.

Part II: Its Content

The Genesis creation story falls into five parts: a summary statement (1:1), the negative state of the earth at the time of creation (1:2), the six days of creation (1:3-31), a summary conclusion (2:1), and an epilogue about the Sabbath day (2:2-3). For our purposes we may treat the first two gingerly,⁶ not develop the last two at all, and focus on the process and progress of creation during the first six days as recorded in this account of creation.⁷

Summary statement (v. 1)

Three lines of evidence validate that verse one summarizes the rest of the chapter. First, "heaven and earth," is a hendiadys (a single expression of two apparently separate parts) denoting "the cosmos," the complete, orderly, harmonious universe. For example, the hendiadys "kith and kin" indicates all of one's relatives. More specifically, the hendiadys is a merism, a statement of opposites to indicate totality, like the compounds, "day and night," "summer and winter."

Now the elements of a compound must be studied as a unit, not in isolation. The hendiadys,⁸ "heaven and earth," cannot be understood by treating "heaven" and "earth" as separate elements any more than "butterfly" can be decoded by investigating "butter" and "fly" in isolation. Umberto Cassuto⁹

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commented:

In language, as in chemistry, a compound may be found to possess qualities absent from its constituent elements. Any one who does not know what 'broadcast' denotes, will not be able to guess the connotation of the word from its separate elements 'broad' and 'cast'.

The Sumerian compound *anki*, composed of *an*, "heaven," and *ki*, "earth," also signifies "universe." The intertestamental book, *Wisdom of Solomon* (11:17), actually renders the merism by the Greek word, "*cosmos*." In poetry the stereotyped phrase, "heaven and earth" is often split apart. Note how the trope stands as an equivalent of "all things" in Isa 44:24:

I am the LORD who makes *all things*,
who stretched out the *heavens* by myself,
who alone spreads out the *earth*.

If verse 1 were translated "In the beginning God created the cosmos," one would see more clearly that it is a summary statement about what God made during the six days of creation, not about what God made before them.

Second, the verb *bara*, "create," for both lexical and grammatical reasons refers to the finished cosmos, not a state before its completion. Regarding its meaning J. Stek¹⁰ commented:

It is silent as to the utilization of pre-existent materials or the time (whether at the beginning of time or in the midst of time, whether instantaneously or over a period of time) as the means involved. In biblical language, *bara* affirms of some existent reality that God conceived, willed, and effected it.

"Create" in Genesis 1 embraces the process and progress of creation over the six days of creation in verse 3-31. Grammatically, it is a telic verb, that is, it refers "to a situation ... that involves a process that leads up to a well-defined terminal point, beyond which the process cannot continue" according to the Cambridge linguist, Bernard Comrie.¹¹ Other telic verbs include "sell" and "die." Although "sell" and "die" include processes up to a definitive point, one has not sold until property is exchanged or died until life finally ceases. "Create" involves the processes narrated for the six days of creation, but the cosmos was not created until, as the summary statement in 2:1 puts it, "the heavens and earth were completed in their vast array."

Third, the grammar of the Hebrew text, as the writer argued in detail elsewhere,¹² favours render-

ing the first verse, "In the beginning God created the cosmos," not "when God began to create the cosmos." For the purposes of this essay, namely, to decide the literary genre of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and its compatibility or incompatibility with scientific theories of origins, the point of grammar need not be pursued here.

In sum, verse 1 is adumbrated in the rest of the chapter.

Earth's Negative State (v. 2)

Verse two describes earth's threefold condition when God began to create the cosmos. First, it was *tohu wabohu*, "unformed and unfilled." *Tohu wabohu* is also a hendiadys, not a merism, like *dribs and drabs*, *spic and span*, *hem and haw*, signifying "utter chaos." By chaos I do not mean the earth was unstructured in a scientific sense but that it was uninhabitable and uninhabited. "Unformed and unfilled" (= "utter chaos") is the antonym of "heaven and earth" (= the "total cosmos"). E. Jacob¹³ wrote: "where it [*tohu wabohu*] is met (Is 34:11; Jer 4:23), [it] denotes the contrary of creation and not merely an inferior stage of creation." Against Luther and Calvin, the text cannot mean that God created the "heaven and the earth" and what he brought into existence was an "unformed and unfilled" earth. The cosmos of verse 1 and the chaos of verse 2 cannot have co-existed. E. Jacob¹⁴ continued: "Evidently we must regard Gen 1:2 as a parenthesis which seeks to describe the condition before creation and 1:1 as the heading of the whole chapter." *In sum, Genesis one represents the Heavenly King transforming the pre-existing chaos into the present cosmos.*

Second, there was "darkness was over the surface of the deep." The Bible does not explain the origins of the darkness and of the abyss, both so hostile to life. Other Scriptures (e.g., Isa 44:24; Jer 10:16; Ps 90:2) affirm that God, and inferentially not matter, is eternal. Of Jesus Christ Paul said: "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:17). The Genesis creation account, however, teaches only that God brought the pre-Genesis darkness and chaotic waters within his protective restraints, not when or how they happened. The writer of Hebrews says: "By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb 1:5). But in Gen 1:2, in contrast to verses 3-31, no divine command is heard. The first heaven and

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The six days of creation

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earth, in which we earthlings live, exists between the pre-creation chaos (Gen 1:2) and the new heaven and earth in which there will be no night and no sea (Rev 21:1-2, 22-25). If one wishes to form a concord between natural theology and Genesis 1, which I for one do not, then let it be noted that the age of the earth cannot be decided by this text and that one must commence one's thinking about cosmic origins with chaotic waters already in existence.¹⁵

Finally, "the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Although the account does not specify the origin of the waters, it instructs us that the Spirit of God was hovering over them to protect and prepare the uninhabitable earth for creation as an eagle hovers over its fledglings (Deut 32:11) and as the Spirit of God prepares humans to receive the word of God that can make them into new creations in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 4:6).

The six days of creation (vv. 3-31)

a) The process of creation

God segregated the process of creation into six days, each of which essentially consists of six panels: an announcement, "and God said"; a command, "let there be" or its equivalent; a report, "and so God made" or its equivalent; a naming, restricted to the first three days, "and he called"; an evaluation, "it was good"; and a chronological framework, "first day," "second day." As we shall argue below, the language is anthropomorphic, representing God in human dress.¹⁶ Moses does not intend to say that God speaks and sees as a human. Behind his figurative anthropomorphisms lie the spiritual realities represented by them.

The *announcement*, "and God said," teaches that the whole world and all that it contains were created according to the plan of the One God and through an agency best represented by "word" (cf. Jn 1:1-18). The *commandment*, "let there be," expresses the truth that this cosmos came into existence by God's will, which, operating without restraint, overcame the chaos. The *report*, "and so God made," or its equivalent, presents the creed that God is transcendent over everything, including the gathered sea and the darkness. By *naming* the elements on the first three days, the life supportive systems of sky and/or air, land, and water, God shows that he is the Supreme Ruler over them. Even the elements of the uncreated state, the Abyss and darkness, are under his dominion. His *evaluation*, "and it was

good," as William Dumbrell¹⁷ shows, instructs that everything fulfills the divine intention for them. Humans should not fear the good creation but rather the Heavenly King, the universal and absolute monarch, who rules them. The *chronological framework* reveals that God created the cosmos in an orderly and, as will be seen in the discussion on "the progress of creation," logical way.

Cassuto¹⁸ noted the conscious, not the coincidental, use of the important number seven along with the numbers three and ten to structure our text and to determine many of its details. Embedded in ancient Near Eastern literatures the number six represents incompleteness and the number seven represents resolution, wholeness, completeness. The seven days of creation are marked off by seven paragraphs in the Massoretic text. The ten announcements, "and God said," are clearly divisible into two groups: the first group contains seven divine commands in a jussive form (e.g., "let there be," "let the earth bring forth") enjoining the creation of the creatures, and three imperatives in other grammatical forms for humans. The evaluation, "it was good," appears seven times, being omitted for the second day and repeated twice for the third. The first verse has seven words, and the second fourteen, twice seven, and so forth. To these Henri Blocher¹⁹ adds the seven completion formula, "and it was so," and the seven times that a further statement is added (God names or blesses).

b) Progress of creation

Since the time of Herder (c. 1750 A.D.) students have noted that Genesis 1:1-2:3 represents the creation as occurring in two triads of days, days 1-3 matched by days 4-6:

<u>Unformed</u>		<u>Unfilled</u>
1. Light	4.	Luminaries
2. Sky/atmosphere and Water	5.	Fish and Fowl
3. Land Vegetation	6.	Beasts Humans

During the first triad God separated the formless chaos into static spheres: light and darkness, the sky and/or atmosphere, water and land; and in the second triad he filled those spheres that house and shelter life with moving forms; that is in the second triad he populates the first. Each triad progresses from heaven

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to earth: from light to dry land, from heavenly luminaries to earth creatures. Each triad progresses from a first day with a single creative act, light matched by luminaries, to a second day with one creative act with two aspects, sky and seas paired with fish and birds, to a third day with two separate creative acts, dry land and vegetation coupled with land animals and humans. Each triad ends with the earth bringing forth: first flora and then fauna. The inhabitants of the second triad rule over the static spheres of the first: luminaries over the light, birds over the sky, fish over the sea, beasts over the land that houses them and the vegetation that feeds them, and humans over all living things.²⁰

In sum, the Genesis account's remarkably symmetrical representation of the process and progress of creation supports Henri Blocher's²¹ claim that it is at the least a magnificent literary-artistic representation of the creation. Is it more?

Its Genre

We will judge its literary genre by critically appraising other suggested possibilities.

A Hymn?

Is it a hymn? Hardly, for the poetic mode, the linguistic conventions, and doxological tone of known ancient Near Eastern hymns are notably absent in Genesis 1.

Cult liturgy?

Is it a cult liturgy composed for a New Year festival like other pagan cosmogonies? No. The reconstruction of such a ritual in Israel is a hypothetical fiction. In fact, this account polemicizes against the magic that made those rituals cogent within their social structures. Nahum Sarna²² said:

The inextricable tie between myth and ritual, the mimetic enactment of the cosmogony in the form of ritual drama, which is an essential characteristic of the pagan religions, finds no counterpart in the Israelite cult. In this respect too, the Genesis story represents a complete break with Near Eastern tradition. To be sure, there are points of contact between ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies such as creation out of chaos, creation by separation, and creation of opposites, but pantheism, polythe-

ism, and annual recreation through magical myths and rituals, are not among them.²³

Myth?

Is it myth? Here the answer may be "yes" or "no," depending on one's definition of myth. J. W. Rogerson²⁴ catalogued twelve different definitions of the term. If one means by myth nothing more than a story that explains phenomena and experience, or a story about God/gods, or a story about him/them as working and having his/their being in this world among humans in the same mode as men speak and work, then Genesis 1 can be labelled "myth" for it satisfies those definitions. In its popular sense, however, "myth" has come to be identified with a fairy tale, imaginary and fantastic events that never happened. As will be shown the narrator of Genesis 1 connects his creation account with real history, and so the designation, "myth," is best rejected. Peter says, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories [Gr. *mythois*] when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty" (2 Pet 1:16).

History?

Is it history? Here our answer is both a qualified "yes" and "no." The Genesis creation account sets forth as historical fact that God created the universe with its vast array of moving forms. Furthermore, the author of Genesis links this prologue to the rest of his book structured about ten historical accounts by clearly linking it with his first two accounts. The first account, "the account of the heavens and earth," recounting the origin, development and spread of sin (2:4-4:26), is unmistakably coupled with the prologue by the addition, "when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens." Likewise, he clearly binds his second account, "the written account of Adam's line" (5:1-3), with 1:26-28 by repeating such crucial terms as "image" and "likeness," and "male and female."

On the other hand, he is just as clearly not giving us in his prologue a straightforward, sequential history. Henry Morris²⁵ misleads us when he claims: "The creation account is clear, definite, sequential and matter-of-fact, giving every appearance of straight forward historical narrative." If not, he argues, it is a blatant deception. The text, however, is begging us not to read it in this way.

First, consider how such a reading creates an *irreconcilable contradiction between the prologue of Genesis and the supplemental creation account in Genesis 2:4-25*. According to the prologue, the first creation narrative, God created vegetation on the third day, fish and fowl on the fifth, and beasts and humans on the sixth. According to the second, a supplemental, creation account (2:4-25), however, between the creation of man (2:7) and the creation of woman (2:18-25), God planted a garden (2:8); caused its trees to grow (2:9); caused a heavenly river to flow from the top of Mount Eden through the garden whereupon it divided into four rivers flowing to the four corners of the earth (2:10); put the man he formed into the garden to work it and keep it and placed him on probation (v. 15); and apparently, before he built the woman, formed the birds and animals (v. 19), and the man named them all (v. 20). Gleason Archer²⁶ exclaimed: "Who can imagine that all these transactions could possibly have taken place in 120 minutes of the sixth day (or even within twenty-four hours, for that matter)?"

Take the trees alone. Even if the orchard in view was planted three days earlier, are we to put our imaginations in fast-forward and see its trees as growing to maturity and bearing fruit within three days? Unlike chapter 1, where one could appeal to apparent age with reference to such things as the stellar bodies, one cannot make a similar appeal to the planted trees. To be sure God could have caused the trees to grow instantaneously, even as Jesus in a moment turned water into wine (Jn 2:1-11), but the Genesis narrative, using the verbs "plant" and "cause to grow," gives no indication that an extraordinarily quick growth of trees is intended, whereas John labels Jesus' work as "the first of his miraculous signs." A straightforward reading of the Genesis prologue is improbable in light of its supplementary account of creation.

As so often happens in Scripture, historical events have been dischronologized and reconstructed for theological reasons. For example, the nations listed in Genesis 10 came into existence after the confusion of languages at Babylon recounted in Genesis 11, but the writer has dischronologized events in order to put the nations under Noah's blessing, not under the Babylon's curse.²⁷ According to Genesis 35:16-18 Benjamin was born in Canaan, but less than ten verses later it lists Benjamin among the Jacob's sons born in Paddan-Aram, presumably to represent the youngest patriarch as taking part in the return of all

Israel from the exile in Paddan-Aram. Biblical writers display a freedom in representing historical events for theological reasons.

Second, the creation of light on the first day and of luminaries on the fourth, confirms our suspicion that Genesis 1 ought not be read as straightforward history. John Sailhamer²⁸ argues, "the division between 'the day' and 'the night' ... leaves little room for an interpretation of 'the light' in v. 3 as other than that of light from the sun." A straightforward reading of Genesis 1:4 and 14 leads to *the incompatible notions that the sun was created on the first day and again on the fourth day*. The suggestion that the sun was created on the first day and made visible on the fourth is unlikely.²⁹ If "let there be" in v. 3 means "let there come into existence," it should have the same meaning in v. 14, not "let them be visible." More plausibly, Moses, representing God as the Ultimate Source of light and the luminaries as its immediate sources, separates the two sources in this matching pair of triads to educate its audience that God is transcendent, not dependent on means.

Furthermore, *verse 14 cannot be reconciled readily with verses 5, 8 and 13*. Our narrator begs us not to read him in a straightforward, sequential account by marking off three days (vv. 5, 8, 13), each with its own "evening and morning," before narrating that on the fourth day God created "the luminaries ... to separate the day from the night, and ... to mark ... days" (v. 14). A sequential reading of the text lacks cogency. How can there be three days characterized by day and night before the creation of the luminaries to separate the day from the night and to mark off the days? Are we clueless?³⁰

Finally, the language of our creation narrative is figurative, anthropomorphic, not plain. The writer's vantage point is with God in His heavenly court.³¹ As a representation of what has transpired in that transcendent sphere, the narrative must employ metaphor. John Stek³² observes:

What occurs in the arena of God's action can be storied after the manner of human events, but accounts of 'events' in that arena are fundamentally different in kind from all forms of historiography. As representations of what has transpired in the divine arena, they are of the nature of metaphorical narrations. They relate what has taken place behind the veil, but translate it into images we can grasp—as do the biblical visions of the heavenly court. However realistic they seem, an essential 'as

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if quality pervades them.

H. Ridderdos³³ concurs:

Is ... the author not under the necessity of employing such a method, because this is the only way to speak about something that is really beyond all human thoughts and words.

Even the very conservative theologian E. J. Young³⁴ admits: "It is certainly true that God did not speak with physical organs of speech nor did he utter words in the Hebrew language." If the other panels in the process of creation are anthropomorphic representations of creation, is it not plausible to suppose the same is true of the chronological framework, the six days? God lisped so that Israel could mime him, working six days and resting the seventh (Exod 20:11). To be sure the six days in the Genesis creation account are our twenty-four hours days, but they are metaphorical representations of a reality beyond human comprehension and imitation.

Science?

Is it science? The answer is a qualified "yes," but finally "no." To be sure it deals with the life supportive systems, air, water, land, with heavenly bodies, sun, moon, stars, and with species of plants and animals, but it treats them in a way unlike scientific literature. Contrary to Henry Morris's³⁵ assertion that "the Biblical record, accepted in its natural and literal sense, gives the only scientific and satisfying account of the origins of things," we argue it cannot give a satisfying scientific account of origins for it is not scientific literature.³⁶

First, *the subject* is God, not the forces of nature. The canons of the scientific method do not allow super-natural causes to be included in a theory.

Second, *their concerns* differ. The Bible is concerned with Ultimate origins ("Where did it all come from?"), not scientific questions of proximate origins (How did A arise out of B, if it did?) The biblical account makes no sharp distinction between immediate cause and Ultimate Source. Langdon Gilkey³⁷ complains: "They [the creation scientists] ignore the (scholastic) distinction between *primary* causal-

ity of a First Cause, with which philosophy or theology might deal, and *second* causality, which is causality confined to finite factors." When our text says, "and God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures'" (v. 20), and, "Let the land produce living creatures," it traces the origins of living creatures back to their ultimate Source, God, not explaining how the proximate sources, water and land, produced them. Genesis does not attempt to link phenomenon with phenomenon but with the covenant keeping God. It is as mischievous to pit a scientific theory of evolution against Genesis as pitting David's account of his Ultimate origin, "You [O, God] created my inmost being" (Ps 139:13), against a geneticist's account of his contingent birth. Third, its *language* is non-scientific. The account reports the origins of the cosmos phenomenologically, not mathematically or theoretically. From a geocentric perspective, the sun, moon and stars are

"in the expanse of the sky"; from a heliocentric perspective they are not. Scientific and biblical languages about origins, like their contents, also supplement, not oppose, each other. People err, however, when they think scientific language is more "correct" than the Bible's. Both languages are relatively, not absolutely, correct or incorrect, depending on their purposes.

Fourth, its *purpose* is non-scientific. Whereas science aims primarily to answer with as much mathematical precision as possible questions about the "when" and "how" of the origin of physical things, Genesis aims primarily to answer

questions about "Who" and "why" they were formed, and passes the value judgment, "it was good." To be sure, it tells us that God created the cosmos "in the beginning" and by his word, but its aim is theological, not mathematical precision. Because the intentions differ so radically one can safely say that Genesis does not attempt to answer scientific questions, and scientists cannot answer those addressed in the biblical creation account. Augustine said of that account, "The Spirit of God who spoke through them did not choose to teach about the heavens to men, as it was of no use for salvation."

Natural theology and exegetical theology are both hindered by a continued adherence to the epistemic principle that valid scientific theories must be consistent with a woodenly literal reading of Genesis.

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Galileo³⁸ was more caustic: "The intention of the Holy Ghost is to teach us how to go to Heaven, not how the heaven goes." Pope John Paul II³⁹, humbly reversing an earlier papal decree, agrees:

The Bible itself speaks to us of the origin of the universe and its makeup, not in order to provide us with a scientific treatise, but in order to state the correct relationship of man with God and the universe.... Any other teaching about the origin and make-up of the universe is alien to the intentions of the Bible, which does not wish to teach how heaven was made, but how to go to heaven.

The biblical goals remain outside the parameters of the scientific method. "The function of setting up goals and passing statements of value transcends the domain of science," says Albert Einstein. The purpose of the Bible and of science, like their contents and languages, also do not confront one another but complete each other. Persons are impoverished intellectually and spiritually by limiting themselves to either one.

Finally, the biblical and scientific accounts are *validated* in different ways: the former by the Spirit of God, the latter by empirical testing.

Since the biblical narrative is non-scientific, we draw the double conclusion that it cannot be a satisfying scientific account of the origins of things and that it can be supplemented by scientific theories. The Bible and a scientific theory of origins clash only when the latter is set forth as the complete explanation of origins and the former is interpreted as a scientific treatise.

Is it theology?

Is it theology? In substance, "yes," for it treats divine matters, but in style, "no," for the narrative reports God's actions, not reflections upon them.

We come back then to Henri Blocher's suggested genre identification: it is a literary-artistic representation of the creation. To this we add the purpose, namely, to ground the covenant people's worship and life in the Creator, who transformed chaos into cosmos, and their ethics in His created order.

Conclusion

The sixteenth century Belgic Confession states:

"We know Him by two means: First, by the creation, preservation, and government of

the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many characters leading us to *see clearly the invisible things of God, even his everlasting power and divinity*, as the apostle Paul says (Rom 1:20). All which things are sufficient to convince men and leave them without excuse. Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation."

Now these two books about creation complement one another, but they cannot and should not be harmonized. With the one hand, we salute Henry Morris and other creation scientists for their yeoman work in pointing scientists to the Creator through their researches in his creation. Creation points humans to the Creator; Genesis 1 identifies him as Israel's covenant keeping God. We hold out the palm of the other hand, however, to caution against the danger of harmonizing scientific studies in natural theology with a straightforward, scientific reading of Genesis 1:1-2:3. These two books clash when scientists, attempting to speak about metaphysical matter, substitute creationism with naturalism, and when exegetes use Genesis to construct a scientific theory of cosmic and biological origins. Natural theology and exegetical theology are both hindered by a continued adherence to the epistemic principle that valid scientific theories must be consistent with a woodenly literal reading of Genesis. Because of the attempt to harmonize Genesis with science, such implausible interpretations of Genesis 1 as "the Restitution Theory," commonly called "the Gap Theory," and "the Day-Age Theory" have vexed biblical exegesis, and scientific theories presupposing a young earth and denying evolution, unnecessarily have discredited their advocates, despite their unconvincing protests that they are not influenced by Genesis. Let each book speak its own language and be appropriately exegeted and explicated, and let each in its own way bring praise to the Creator, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Endnotes

1. I am grateful to Dr. Denis O. Lamoureux of the University of Alberta for helpful criticisms of my original essay.
2. George Brooke, "Creation in the Biblical Tradition," *Zygon*, 22 (1987): 233.
3. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the

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authorship of the final form of the Pentateuch, which was composed of several sources, including both Mosaic and post-Mosaic materials.

4. J. Stek, "What Says the Scripture," *Portraits of Creation* (1990): 230.

5. Conrad Hyers, "Biblical Literalism: Constricting the Cosmic Dance," in *Is God a Creationist? The Religious Case Against Creation-Science*, edited by Roland Mushat Frye (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983) 101.

6. For a detailed exegesis of Genesis 1:1,2 see B. K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Gen 1:1-3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1974) 25-36, 136-44, 216-28, 327-42; 133 (1976) 28-41.

7. The terms "process" and "progress" are used in their non-technical senses. The writer rejects Process Theology as unbiblical. Also, he does not infer by these terms that Genesis is teaching evolution. He uses them merely as an economic method to exegete the manner of creation.

8. Also, a syntagm, a series of different elements forming a syntactic unit.

9. U. Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis, I* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1961): 22.

10. Stek, 213.

11. Bernard Comrie, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1976): 45.

12. Waltke, 221-27.

13. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958) 144, n. 2.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Contra Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976): 42-46.

16. Better than "anthropomorphisms" we should speak of "theomorphisms": humankind's physical aspects represent God's spiritual functions.

17. William Dumbrell, "Creation, Covenant and Work," *Crux*, Vol. XXIV, No 3 (1988): 16-17.

18. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 12-15.

19. Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, translated by David G. Preston (Leicester, England and Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press): 33.

20. For further demonstration of the literary artistry of the Genesis creation narrative see Mark A. Throntveit, "Are the Events in the Genesis Creation Account Set Forth in Chronological Order?" in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, edited by Ronald Youngblood (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986): 36-55.

21. Blocher, 49-59.

22. Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books) 9.

23. In a private communication Denis O. Lamoureux calls attention to F. M. Cornford, "Pattern of Ionian Cosmology," in M. K. Munitz, ed., *Theories of the Universe: From Babylonian Myth to Modern Science* (New York: Free Press, 1957), p. 22.

24. John William Rogerson, *Myth in the Old Testament Interpretation* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1974).

25. Morris, 84.

26. Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964) 192.

27. David J. A. Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield, England: Department of Biblical Studies, The

University of Sheffield, 1978) 68.

28. John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol. II (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1990) 26.

29. Sailhamer argues that "heaven and earth" in v. 1 expresses "totality," (p. 23), including the celestial bodies. He further renders v. 14 to read "And God said, 'Let the lights [created in v. 1] in the expanse of the sky separate.'" Although a syntactical possibility, his interpretation of Gen 1:1 curiously entails the creation of everything before the six days of creation rather than a summary adumbrated in those days.

30. Since all six days are based upon the diurnal appearances of the sun, they presumably have the same character. It would be very curious if the first three days were calibrated by a different measure of time from that applied to the last three. All six days are the same as our twenty-four hour days.

The appeal to "day" in compounds such as "in the day" (Gen 2:4) and "the day of the LORD" to validate the "Day-Age Theory," the theory that "day" in Genesis 1 does not necessarily denote the twenty-four hour diurnal day but may designate a geologic age or stage, is linguistically flawed. The use of "day" in syntagms, "the ordered and unified arrangement of words in a distinctive way," such as these is clearly different from its use with numerals: "first day," "second day." The argument is as fallacious as saying that "apple" does not necessarily indicate the round edible fruit of the rosaceous tree because this is not its meaning in "pineapple."

31. The "us" in verse 26 is best interpreted as referring to God and the divine begins gathered about Him. The first person plural pronoun assumes those antecedents in its two other uses in Genesis, 3:22 and 11:7. In Isaiah 6:8, the only other passage using "us" with reference to God, Isaiah, upon being transported into the heavenly court and overhearing God's consultation with the seraphim, records God using the same mixture of singular and plural first person pronouns as Moses, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" (Isa 6:8). In spite of the King's use of "us" in his deliberations with His court, He is the sole Actor. He created humans (Gen 1:26-28) and sent Isaiah (Isa 6:9). See P. D. Miller, *Genesis 1-11: Studies in Structure and Theme*, in JSOT Supplement Series 8 (Sheffield, England: The University of Sheffield, 1978).

32. Stek, *Portraits*, 236.

33. H. Ridderbos, "The Meaning of Genesis I," *Free University Quarterly*, 4 (1955/57): 222.

34. Edward Joseph Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing House, 1964): 55-56.

35. Henry M. Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 1978): iv.

36. The writer leans heavily in this discussion on Charles E. Hummel, *The Galileo Connection: Resolving Conflicts between Science & the Bible* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986).

37. Langdon Gilkey, "Creationism: The Roots of the Conflict," in *Is God a Creationist?*, R. M. Frye, ed., 60.

38. Galileo, "Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina," in *Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo*, ed. and trans. by Stillman Drake (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1957) 186.

39. John Paul II, "Science and Scripture: The Path of Scientific Discovery," *Origins* (1981), 11:277-80, with quotation on p. 279.

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The word genre comes directly from the French word meaning "kind" or "sort." Further back, it stems from the Latin word *genus* and the Greek word *genos* (γένος). In reading the Book of Genesis, especially the early chapters, many fail to appreciate the different literary forms. They want the creation stories to be science or exact history when in fact they are more poetic and theological than scientific. The stories advance the real and true point that God alone created everything there is out of nothing, and did so in an intentional and systematic way in which He was involved at every stage.