



## God's Decree of Creation

*When "Other" Came Into Being*

(Westminster Confession of Faith IV:1)

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God has been called the "*Wholly Other*". He is different than anything we are, observe, or experience. It is impossible to fully describe God in terms of things we are or know. He is eternal and infinite. We and everything else that is not God came into being by his *Decree of Creation*. It was then that the idea of "*other*" came into being. We are we're part of the "*other*". I call that creation moment the "**Dawn of Otherness**". Eternally there was the infinite God. He always existed in three persons, of one substance, one God. The three substances interact with one another in an "**eternal intra-substantial dynamic**". When God created the spirit beings and material things something "other" than what-always-is came into being.

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(The Bible quotations in this Study are from the *New American Standard Bible* (1988 edition) unless otherwise noted.)

### Part 1

## The Boundaries of the Doctrine of Creation

### The Hermeneutical Foundation

The principles of biblical interpretation that characterize the Reformed approach to exegesis include the demand that we accept as fact all that is "**either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added**" (WCF 1:6). Therefore all that the Bible teaches sets the boundaries for what we believe and do. All that is not affirmed by this rule must remain theoretical, and not ready for consideration in building our confessions of faith. Theological models are only helpful tools for exploring ideas if they avoid incorporating concepts and structures not derived by either direct statement, or by good and necessary consequence, from the Bible alone. This approach will not give us all the answers to all the questions that come into our minds. But what it clearly teaches yield the kind of confidence we ought to have in matters central to giving proper glory to God.

The development of theological models for understanding the creation of the material universe must be tempered by this exegetical rule without compromise. The exegete must not be enticed to propose structures to accommodate assumptions underlying popular scientific theories, commonly accepted understandings, theological conjectures, or difficult to reconcile observations. Even the learned views of the preponderance of scholars with the concurrence of councils is not sufficient to justify adoption of even the most apparently insignificant and seemingly innocuous piece of data. The confession wisely counsels us, "**The supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.**" (WCF 1:10), and again "**All synods or councils, since the Apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.**" (WCF 31:3).

The continuing controversy over the age of the universe, and the time structure of Genesis 1, has yielded many approaches to the doctrine of creation. I have categorized 16 different views of the interpretation of the "*days*" of Genesis One. Of the 16, not all affirm that the Bible is without error and that the rules of interpretation must be themselves derived from the way God uses language in Scripture. On that basis, some may be eliminated from the start based upon principles we have already derived from the word of God.

Since there is but one true way to understand Genesis One, we must conclude that in at least 15 of the 16 views (or perhaps in all 16 of the ones I have presently examined) there are ideas incorporated which are neither directly stated in Scripture, nor directly derivable by good and necessary consequence from the Bible alone. The

task of the exegetical theologian is to identify such assumptions and disqualify the models that rely upon them. This process is negative in that it does not promise to generate a final and acceptable model which will account for all the revealed information God has given us. Consequently our duty is not to determine what underlies that which is revealed in God's inscripturated word, but to define the boundaries that guard against conclusions unsupported by revelation alone. The cry of "*Sola Scriptura*" (Scripture Alone) becomes a sober warning in this endeavor.

### **Creation out of nothing**

A fundamentally unique beginning point distinguishes the biblical view from that of the secularist. All things that exist are believed to have been brought into existence by the creative power of God who alone is eternal and independent.

The Latin expression "*ex nihilo*", which means "out of nothing", is often used to describe the act of creation as recorded in the Bible. The expression is taken from the Apocryphal book 2 Maccabees 7:28. There it says, "[my son, look upon heaven and earth and all that is in them, and consider that God made them out of nothing, and mankind also](#)". Literally it would be rendered, "[not from existing things did God make...](#)".

Though the words "out of nothing" are not directly found in the Bible, they represent a theological idea that if understood in the way intended here, is clearly and necessarily deduced from Scripture. It must be kept in mind that while creation did not originate from any pre-existent matter or its counter-part in energy, it did begin from something. It originated in the decree and power of God who exists eternally. God used nothing outside of himself in his creation of the physical universe. The whole matter-energy continuum which we now observe had its origin in the intent and power of the eternal Creator.

John 1:3 "[All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.](#)"

Psalms 33:6 "[By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host](#)"

Those who do not accept the fact of a Creator have a serious problem in explaining the origin of the first matter and energy. The approach of the classical rationalist requires him to deal with an unsettling philosophical presupposition: Since observation is his touchstone of truth, he is forced to follow the principle expressed by the Latin term, "*ex nihilo nihil fit*" which means "out of nothing, nothing becomes." This leaves him unable to account for the initial coming into being of the matter-energy continuum itself. Since God and his ancient workings are beyond observation, they cannot address a supernatural beginning to all things. A purely physical model must be devised to fit their first assumptions.

The non-creationist's presuppositions force his theories upon him due to his starting set of axioms. These beginning assumptions must therefore stand as presumptions without the possibility of formal proof. Otherwise his starting points cease to exist as axioms. If provable from other observations or reasons, then the propositions used as proof become the new presumed axioms. This means that for the pure naturalist, the matter-energy continuum must itself be eternal, at least in some sense.

The newer cosmological models of origins attempt to incorporate a more "fuzzy" and undefined concept of the universe. Probabilistic states introduced in the quantum approach allow for initial boundary conditions to be presumed which would allow a sudden origin which became all things. This permits a theory exempted from having to account for a hot big bang. But the setting of these boundary conditions is a remaining difficulty which is often attributed to "something prior" which they often, with evident discomfort and a flood of disclaimers, label as "god". This "*creator*" is certainly not the God of Scripture. He is a philosophical necessity without which their basic assumptions end the discussion without the possibility of developing any cosmological or cosmogonical theories.

There is a further and deeper problem for the secularist. If the universe which includes man is created by an independent and eternal Creator out of nothing external to God, then man is accountable to that Creator to live as he was made to live. He is obligated to fulfill the purposes of the one who made him. This means that objective absolutes exist and that each person may be justly considered guilty for failing to obey the Creator and for failing to live up to God's purpose in creating him. Therefore fallen man struggles with the moral necessity

of denying creation and the moral absolutes implied by it. That is his prejudice . It conditions his interpretation of all facts observed in the universe.

Since we are created as the Bible reports, since humans are made in God's image, and since they are obligated to glorify him, then it is man's duty to live according to the Creator's moral principles and to give his Creator due honor in all things. Man is to subdue all things so as to manifest God's glory. This forces the conclusion that there is real purpose in human existence. The doctrine of creation establishes an objective foundation for human worth and offers true hope and promise for the redemption of creation so that it will fulfill the purpose for which it was brought into existence.

The mechanistic view of existence which denies a personal Creator, also denies that there is any existence beyond the grave or any hope of renewed joy and peace inwardly during this life.

### **Areas of Agreement and Disagreement Among Biblical Creationists**

All biblical creationists agree that the author of all the universe is the One Triune God. All three persons of the Trinity were involved in the act of creating all that exists outside of the eternal God Himself.

#### **God the Father worked in creation:**

1 Corinthians 8:6, "[there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him...](#)"

Hebrews 1:2 God who... "[in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.](#)" [the Father working through the Son]

#### **God the Son worked in creation:**

Hebrews 1:2 (just quoted above)

John 1:3 Speaking in the context of Jesus as the Word it says, "[all things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.](#)"

Colossians 1:16-18, "[in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.](#)"

#### **God the Holy Spirit worked in creation:**

Genesis 1:2, "[and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters](#)"

Job 26:13, "[By His breath \(Spirit\) the heavens are cleared \(made beautiful\)](#)"

Job 33:4, "[The Spirit of God has made me...](#)"

Biblical Creationists agree that **the purpose of creation is to bring pleasure to God by manifesting his glory, and to declare what is true.**

Colossians 1:16, "[...all things have been created through Him and for Him](#)"

Ephesians 1:11, "[...who works all things after the counsel of His will](#)"

Romans 11:36, "[for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.](#)"

Isaiah 60:21, "[...the work of my hands, that I may be glorified](#)"

Ephesians 3:9-10, "[...God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.](#)"

Psalms 19:1, "[The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament is declaring the work of His hands.](#)"

Romans 1:20, "[for since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse](#)"

Biblical creationists also agree that the concept of *macro evolution* is not consistent with the record of Scripture. Adam is presented as an individual human, not a mythical character. He received his physical form from what is called the "[dust of the earth](#)" (the basic elements) rather than from already existing living life forms. He appears as a mature human being rather than as an embryo or baby. Similarly there are broad categories of other created things which appear to come into their completed form by the sudden declaration by God rather than by natural processes. Certain categories of created life forms bring forth offspring after their "[kind](#)". The origin of all life forms from one base molecule or organism is therefore impossible within the boundaries of biblical data.

All biblical creationists also agree that process and change are part of the development of the original universe from what it was at first into what we see it to be today. For example, the entire human race, with all its present genetic diversity, developed from the original gene pool consisting only of what was present in the first man and woman, Adam and Eve.

Some presume that our genetic diversity came into the human race by sudden acts of special creation by God at times after the events of Genesis One. They say that certain genetic configurations and gene combinations were introduced by decree at various points in response to moral lapses of mankind.

This theory must not be accepted for several reasons. First, it is neither directly stated nor is it necessarily deduced from an exegesis of Scripture. It is deemed necessary only to support an assumed set of conclusions which themselves are not derived from Scripture in a direct or deductive manner. Second, it denies that all things were created prior to the fall of mankind in Eden. This is a very questionable idea and is in itself an assumption that goes beyond the creation record the Bible preserves for us. Third, this theory implies that our racial diversity and individual appearances are related to moral judgments and therefore there is something wrong with such differences. Tragically some have used this idea in support of racial bigotry by promoting the idea that some races are inferior in that they exist only because of sin and represent God's judgment upon them. Therefore responsible exegetical theologians will reject this proposal as being unsupported.

Accepting then that diversity has arisen since the time of creation, a further conflict arises in trying to define the degree to which the unique forms we now know were either created immediately, or are the result of process. The perceived battle between science and Scripture has often confused the issue more than helped it toward resolution. One problem is simplified by the principle of Bible interpretation so well stated in the reformed approach to truth; only what is directly stated or necessarily derivable from Scripture is worthy of being held as Christian doctrine.

It is hard to avoid the natural reading of the language of Genesis which supports that the divine decrees include the use of subsequent process. For example, we read that God said, "[Let the earth bring forth living creatures ... and it was so.](#)" One of our tasks is to discover the limits that form a boundary around this process, and the meaning of expressions like this one just quoted. But to rule out subsequent process entirely, is to ignore clear statements of the Creation account and to neglect the continuing work of providence by which God brings that which he has decreed to pass.

### **Defining the Issues in the Creationist Debate**

The foundation for truth lies in its existence in the eternal mind of the Creator. Truth itself is established from outside our system of sensory perceptions and is only known within it by revelation. Revelation has occurred in both the general and special senses. For the purposes of this study it will be assumed that the reader understands the distinction and definitions of these two modes of revelation (general and special). [see the first unit in our studies in Theology, "*Prolegomena*", the lesson on "*Revelation*" which is based upon Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 1 for a more complete discussion of the modes of divine revelation.]

We deny the nature of revealed truth if we use arguments for creation that originate from observations and perceptions that are independent of the special revelation added for the benefit of our fallen minds. Because such arguments begin with the finite, they cannot establish the infinite with certainty.

### **The Hermeneutic of "*Literal Interpretation*"**

We must interpret Scripture by the rules of literature as employed by God in the process of inspiration. It must be read as intended originally by the author for the purpose he had in mind in each passage considered. It must be interpreted as it would commonly have been understood by the original readers and in a manner consistent with the rest of inspired Scripture.

The accepted rules of literature allow for literary forms such as metaphors, anthropomorphisms, idioms, culturally and temporally significant expressions, and other figures of speech. There must be no hidden rules of interpretation or secret symbolisms. All symbolisms accepted in biblical exegesis must have sound evidence for their meaning taking in the whole linguistic system available to the original readers, particularly their understanding of the Scriptures available to them at the time the passage in question was written.

The Bible at times mentions the "hand of God." Psalm 95:5 says, "[and His hands formed the dry land.](#)" But God reveals himself to be a *spirit*. As such he has no physical hands. Therefore we have sound evidence that this is intended figuratively as an anthropomorphism.

The wings of God must also be taken as figurative. Psalm 17:8 says, "[...Hide me in the shadow of Thy wings](#)" Since God is spirit, he cannot be imagined as being divided into physical parts distinguishable as wings.

The "chain" that holds Satan must be taken figuratively. Revelation 20:1-2 says, "[I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. and he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years,](#)" Physical chains cannot hold spirit beings.

Therefore, by "*literal*" we mean that the normal rules of literary interpretation apply. Figurative uses are a part of literature and must be determined by the context. In the study of the Bible we must consider the immediate context of the specific passage being studied. The context of the other inspired writings must also be taken into consideration, along with the grammatical and historical context of the original readers.

### **Author's Note**

I will present the conclusions I have drawn as this study of the Doctrine of Creation progresses. I promote what I call *exegetical minimalism*. This hermeneutical principle states that the boundaries of our model building must be set by those things directly stated in Scripture or necessarily derived from Scripture. By the use of the grammatical-historical-theological method (as detailed in the first unit of our Theological studies on Prolegomena - Interpretation) the boundaries within which we may safely construct models are drawn most conservatively. No assumptions drawn from sensory observations, human experience, or presumed pure reason can be incorporated into the process. While we may permit variations of views within those boundaries we must neither allow consideration of models that transgress those boundaries, nor allow our surmises within the boundary conditions to become elevated to credal statements that bind the conscience.

### **Preliminary Conclusions**

Theological statements are not limited in the same sense as those of scientific theories. Science should be limited by a theology based upon special revelation. It cannot go beyond what the Creator of all things has made known to be true. But Theology is not limited by science in the same way. We are not obligated to limit what we accept as true by the narrowness of our personal observations or the direct observations of other persons by natural means.

The questions that continue to divide us may not yield answers for all we would like to know. We must be satisfied with setting firm boundaries based upon revealed data only. Within those boundaries we may speculate, but we dare not establish credal statements that bind the conscience of God's people.

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Next: Part 2, "*The Events of Genesis One*"