

WCF 04: OF CREATION

We saw in the previous chapter what are the decree(s) of God. “The decrees of God,” in brief, are “His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby, for his own glory, He hath fore-ordained whatsoever comes to pass” (*WSC* 7). But how does God execute his decrees? Simply stated in the words of our catechism, “God executeth His decrees in the works of creation and providence” (*WSC* 8).

All of God’s decree pertains to the created world, both physical and spiritual, and therefore the first thing that God did to execute His decrees was to create the world. Now, this seems straightforward enough so that it would appear that no one at the time of the Assembly disputed the doctrine that is contained in this chapter. This is, unfortunately, no longer so. Many believers including those who would claim to subscribe to the doctrine of our Confession would actually dispute what we are taught in the very first paragraph of this chapter. But these disagreements have arisen, it appears, not so much through a study of the Scripture, but from influence of so-called science of evolution and geological age of the earth. From a purely biblical- exegetical basis our fathers in the faith would have uniformly held that the earth was created in six literal days and is less than 10,000 years old.

Today, there are various views. The old view is now known as “Young Earth Creationism.” Those who hold to this view do not deny micro-evolution (which explains for example, the different species of finches that Charles Darwin observed), but would deny macro-evolution that man evolved from apes and whales from wolves, etc.

But some feel that the evidence for the geologic age of the earth is indisputable, and therefore they proposed various theories that are consistent with an old (4.5 billion years old) earth. These theories may be known as Old Earth Creationism. There are three main types: (1) Gap Creationism holds that there is a gap between Genesis 1:1 (which they claim is about the original creation which failed), and Genesis 1:2 (which begins to describe the creation of the present world). It does not believe in macro-evolution. (2) Day-Age Creationism holds that the days in Genesis 1 should be interpreted as ages which may last millions of years. These usually would usually reject macro-evolution but hold to micro-evolution as occurring over millions of years. (3) Progressive Creationism rejects macro-evolution to explain the origin of the species but replace it with an idea that God intervene at specific moments in history to effect the creation of new species, such as man from apes. These hold that Genesis 1 is to be interpreted symbolically, poetically, metaphorically or literarily (e.g. Framework Hypothesis).

Then there are others hold to Theistic Evolution of various sorts. They believe that God is in control over creation, but that he created the world through the process of evolution so that for all intents and purposes the claims of atheistic scientists are correct except that they (the atheistic scientists) deny the place of God in the process.

It should be noted that the only view that is consistent with our Confession of Faith is Young Earth Creationism. All other views require not only a reading of anti-biblical theories into Scripture, but a re-interpretation of our Confession in ways which are clearly contrary to the intent of the Assembly.

On the Creation of the World

4.1 It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,¹ for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness,² in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good.³

¹Heb 1:2; Jn 1:2–3; Gen 1:2; Job 26:13; 33:4; ²Rom 1:20; Jer 10:12; Ps 104:24; 33:5–6; ³Gen 1; Heb 11:3; Col 1:16; Acts 17:24.

- *Participants of Creation:* the Triune God, all three Persons of the Godhead. The Scripture attributes creation to:
 - (1) God absolutely, without distinction of person: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1).
 - (2) The Father: “There is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things” (1 Cor 8:6).
 - (3) The Father through the Son: “[God] hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:2).
 - (4) The Son: “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (Jn 1:3).
 - (5) The Father through the Holy Spirit: “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30).
 - (6) The Holy Spirit: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Gen 1:2); “By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens” (Job 26:13a).
- *Purpose of Creation:* “for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness.” “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even *his eternal power* and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20); “He hath made the earth *by his power*, he hath established the world *by his wisdom*, and hath stretched out the heavens *by his discretion*” (Jer 10:12); “He loveth righteousness and judgment: *the earth is full of the goodness of the LORD*. By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth” (Ps 33:5–6 cf. Ps 104:24). The chief end of creation, as with the chief end of man, is therefore to glorify God (cf. *WSC* 1, *WLC* 1, Col 1:16; Prov 16:4).
- *Duration of Creation: Six Days:* “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. ... And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made” (Gen 1:31; 2:2).
- *Objects of Creation:* All things—visible and invisible. “For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible ...” (Col 1:16a; cf. Acts 17:24). The angelic host was probably created on the first day (Gen 1:1) since they were present when God laid the foundations of the world: “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ...When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4, 7).

- *Source or Material for Creation: nothing (Ex nihilo).* “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb 11:3). That there was nothing before God began to create is attested by: (1) Christ’s reference to a time when the world was absolutely non-existent: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (Jn 17:5); (2) The Hebrew verb used in Genesis 1:1 is best translated “create out of nothing”; and (3) If anything were not created by God, they must be pre-existent and must exist in and of themselves, which would contradict Romans 11:36, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.” Note the distinction between *creatio prima*—the first creation of the elementary substance of things and *creatio secunda*—combining of elements in the formation of things. We are referring to the former when we say that God created *ex nihilo*.
- *Condition of universe at Creation: “very good” (Gen 1:31).* This does not mean absolute perfection, for God alone is absolutely perfect. But Adam had original righteousness. Sin had not entered into the world; neither had diseases, deformity, disability, disasters, accidents, etc which came about due to sin.

On Creation of Man

4.2 After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female,¹ with reasonable and immortal souls,² endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image,³ having the law of God written in their hearts,⁴ and power to fulfill it;⁵ and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change.⁶ Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil;⁷ which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.⁸

¹Gen 1:27; ²Gen 2:7; Eccl 12:7; Lk 23:43; Mt 10:28; ³Gen 1:26; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; ⁴Rom 2:14–15; ⁵Eccl 7:29; ⁶Gen 3:6; Eccl 7:29; ⁷Gen 2:17; 3:8–11, 23; ⁸Gen 1:26, 28.

- Man created male and female (Gen 1:27). Adam was formed out “of the dust of the ground” (Gen 2:7), Eve was crafted out of a rib from Adam (Gen 2:22).
- Created with a body and a soul. Some argue that the Scripture distinguishes between the soul (Heb: *nephesh*; Grk: *psuchê*) and spirit (Heb: *ruach*; Grk: *pneuma*) and that trichotomy is clearly taught in Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23. These arguments are, however, invalid. Although the Scripture does speak of the soul as well as the spirit of man, the two terms are often used interchangeably in Scripture, for example Matthew 6:25; 10:28 speak of man as comprising of body and soul, while Ecclesiastes 12:7 and 1 Corinthians 5:3, 5 speak of man as comprising of body and spirit. Moreover, death is sometimes described as giving up the soul (e.g., Gen 35:18; Acts 15:26) and sometimes as giving up the spirit (e.g., Ps 31:5; Acts 7:59); and the immaterial essence of the dead is sometimes describe as the soul (e.g., Rev 20:4) and sometimes as the spirit (e.g., Heb 12:23). Furthermore, Hebrews 4:12 does not imply any more that soul and spirit are distinguishable entities than that thoughts and intents are distinguishable; also, if 1 Thessalonians 5:23 teaches trichotomy, then Luke 10:27 must teach quadratotomy. Paul is emphasising the whole person rather than

differentiating his parts. We conclude, therefore, that the Reformed position that man is dichotomic (2-part) is correct. ‘Soul’ and ‘spirit’ are synonymous.

- The *Imago Dei*. Man was created after God’s own image:
 - i. In the **comprehensive** (or wider) sense this refers to man’s natural image in that he is made a spiritual being with rationality, morality or conscience (*vide infra*), spirituality and immortality. These things makes us like God and distinguishes us from animals. Man today still posses this image of God. Though this image is defaced, it was not completely erased by the Fall. We have not lost immortality, morality, rationality and spirituality. Thus our having the *imago dei* is not spoken of in the past tense in Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 15:49; Jas 3:9). It is on account of this aspect of the image of God that man is given, and continue to have, dominion over the lower creation: “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth” (Gen 1:26; cf. Gen 8:15–9:7; Ps 8:4–9). It is also on this account that the death penalty is instituted for murder: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen 9:6).
 - ii. In the **restricted** (or narrower) sense, this refers to the spiritual qualities that God has created man with, namely, true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Man was created with true knowledge. Unlike animals, he was created to know God and to know what is right and what is wrong according to God’s standard. Man was also created with original righteousness. Unlike animals, he was created with a desire to want to do right. Man was also created with true holiness. Thus unlike animals, man was holy or separated unto God. Animals will merely live their lives according to their nature. Man was created with in such a way that he knows he must serve and glorify. He feels his life to be meaningless and empty unless he is serving God. At least that was until the Fall.

With the Fall, this image was lost because of sin.¹ But thank God it was restored by Christ: “And [ye] have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10); “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). Regenerate man will however possess the original perfection of knowledge, righteousness and holiness when his sanctification is complete.
- The soul of man is immortal or everlasting. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7); “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecc 12:7; cf. Lk 23:43). Since man is not an

¹ The apostle Paul says: “There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:10-11). Understanding is knowledge applied. True knowledge must include understanding. If this is the case than, fallen man, having no understanding, cannot have any degree of true knowledge—even though the works of the law is written in his heart. In other words, as long as we understand that true knowledge is inseparable from right understanding, we could say that fallen man has lost original knowledge completely. Likewise, ‘true holiness’ (Eph 4:24) must include seeking after God. Therefore, since there is none that seek after God, and seeking after Him is a *sine qua non* of true holiness, we may say that despite the religious sense that fallen man has, it would be more accurate biblically to say that man has lost original holiness altogether.

independent being, his existence must be sustained by God forever for him to be immortal.

- Man is not only distinguished from animals by his rationality, but also by his morality, or his having a conscience. This is so because the law of God is written in his heart: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom 2:14–15). In that man was made upright (Ecc 7:29a), he also had the power to fulfill the Law written in his heart. And since he was created a free agent, and left to the liberty of his will which was subject to change or to influence by external causes, he was also under a possibility of transgressing the Law.

Before the Fall, man was *posse peccare, posse non peccare* (able to sin, able not to sin); after the Fall, unregenerate man is *non posse non peccare* (unable not to sin), regenerate man is *posse non peccare* (able not to sin) and glorified man is *non posse peccare* (unable to sin). (Note: subject of Original Righteousness will be dealt with in chapter 6, while Freewill will be dealt with in chapter 9).

- Adam and Eve were, furthermore, given a positive commandment “not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This command—which involves something indifferent in itself—is in a sense a summary or representative of the Moral Law of God inscribed in their heart. Our Confession does not say that Adam and Eve would have been *rewarded* with eternal life as A.A. Hodge:

In this state He subjects them to a moral test for a time. If they stand the test, the reward is that their moral characters are confirmed and rendered infallible, and they are introduced into an inalienable blessedness forever. If they fail, they are judicially excluded from God’s favour and communion forever, and hence morally and eternally dead (*Confession of Faith*, 105–6).

The Confession is carefully worded, rather that “while they kept [the commandment not to eat of the forbidden fruit], they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.” *WSC* 12 is similarly carefully worded to avoid the notion of reward for works or obedience: “When God had created man, He entered into a Covenant of Life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, upon the pain of death” (cf. *WLC* 20).

However, the Confession does not condemn Hodge’s view, which is an old view dating to the time of the Reformation (See Francis Turretine, *Institute of Elenctic Theology*, 1.578 [Topic 9, Q. 3, para 17]). We may say that Adam and Eve would have been confirmed in righteousness (as the good angels were) by grace through obedience if they persisted in keeping the commandment.