

# Genesis – Camps

## *A Blog Discussion*

Wednesday, March 30, 2016

### **The proper view of the doctrine of creation**

Some time back, I saw something to the effect that the Reformed see eschatology when they read Genesis, while Fundamentalists and conservative Evangelicals think of the Creation Museum when they read Genesis. Of course, as with such pithy statements, there are elements of truth in what is said. That said, it is only with the 20th century advent especially of Meredith Kline that Genesis become primarily associated with eschatology. I would content that that is not how the Reformed tradition have historically seen Genesis as being. Am I saying that they do not link Genesis with eschatology? No, I do not make such a claim. Rather, I am claiming that eschatology was not their primary focus when they read Genesis, but rather “mere” protology.

The Reformers were early modern, pre-Enlightenment people. They are not Rationalists seeking to understand all things as God knows them. None of them can ever be accused of being empiricists and thus they would not fit into the empiricist mentality that is characteristic of a significant proportion of the Creation Science movement. Having said that, the Reformers were not irrationalist mystics either, and they sought to be rational. As such, the Reformed would be more aligned with Charles Hodge of Old Princeton than today’s postmodernists, or even those influenced by aspects of postmodernism like Kevin Vanhoozer.

To see how the Reformers and their immediate heirs read Genesis, one can read their commentaries. The idea of setting a date for creation is not a modern, fundamentalist thing, but rather it is already present among the Puritans, which culminated in Archbishop James Ussher’s *Annals of the World*. Chronology, and dating the Genesis chronology, was not a modern endeavor but rather was associated with Puritan scholarship. Taking the Genesis accounts, inclusive of the dates in chronologies, plainly is therefore traditionally Reformed.

When one looks at Reformed commentaries of that era, one see for example in John Calvin the following statements:

The intention of Moses in beginning his Book with the creation of the world, is, to render God, as it were, visible to us in his works. ...

I now return to the design of Moses, or rather of the Holy Spirit, who has spoken by his mouth. We know God, who is himself invisible, only through his works. Therefore, the Apostle elegantly styles the worlds, τὰ μὴ ἐχ φαινομένων βλεπόμενα, as if one should say, “the manifestation of things not apparent,”<sup>30</sup> (Hebrews 11:3.) This is the reason why the Lord, that he may invite us to the knowledge of himself, places the fabric of heaven and earth before our eyes, rendering himself, in a certain manner, manifest in them. For his eternal power and Godhead (as Paul says) are there exhibited, (Romans 1:20.) And that declaration of David is most true, that the heavens, though without a tongue, are yet eloquent heralds of the glory of God, and that this most beautiful order of nature silently proclaims his admirable wisdom, (Psalm 19:1.) This is the more diligently to be observed, because so few pursue the right method of knowing God, while the greater part adhere to the creatures without any consideration of the Creator himself. (John Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis*, Volume 1. Accessed on CCEL [here](#))

We see here that Calvin focuses on the revelation of God in creation when he deals with the fact of creation. Calvin did not immediately talk about the eschatological life, as Klineans would do. No, he speaks of Creation as an actual event and what it actually does in revealing God to Man. God has **created** all things, and this is something that we should marvel. Creation in and of itself

has its own glory; the act of creation is in and of itself glorious. Creation does not need redemption to be complete, neither does it need to contemplate the Eschaton to manifest God's glory.

And now we see Matthew Henry:

The foundation of all religion being laid in our relation to God as our Creator, it was fit that the book of divine revelations which was intended to be the guide, support, and rule, of religion in the world, should begin, as it does, with a plain and full account of the creation of the world—in answer to that first enquiry of a good conscience, “Where is God my Maker?” (Job xxxv. 10). ... The holy scripture therefore, designing by revealed religion to maintain and improve natural religion, to repair the decays of it and supply the defects of it, since the fall, for the reviving of the precepts of the law of nature, lays down, at first, this principle of the unclouded light of nature, That this world was, in the beginning of time, created by a Being of infinite wisdom and power, who was himself before all time and all worlds. The entrance into God's word gives this light, Ps. cxix. 130.. The first verse of the Bible gives us a surer and better, a more satisfying and useful, knowledge of the origin of the universe, than all the volumes of the philosophers. The lively faith of humble Christians understands this matter better than the elevated fancy of the greatest wits, Heb. xi. 3. (Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume I (Genesis to Deuteronomy)*). Accessed on CCEL [here](#))

Again, we do not see eschatology being the main focus in Henry's thinking when he reads Genesis. Rather, his focus is on God revealing Himself to Man, the beginning of God's revelation.

We have therefore seen in both John Calvin and Matthew Henry that neither of them have eschatology as their main focus when they read Genesis. Rather, their focus, as is the traditional Reformed and Christian focus, is on Creation as Creation and Creation as the first act of God's revelation. Thus, to read Genesis as eschatology is Klinean; to read Genesis as Creation Science is to read it as empiricist Fundamentalist; but to be historic Reformed is to read Genesis as God's first revelatory act, and the foundation upon which all knowledge and reality depends.

Posted by Daniel C at [23:03](#)

## COMMENTS:

Kirk Skeptic said...

I'm with you up to your disagreement with Kline, but you lose me on what appears to be a gratuitous swipe at fundies. If Genesis is history rather than midrash, then there are ramifications regarding how we view the mechanics of creation - this is unavoidable. If it is midrash, then who is able to refute Kline, since the details are of secondary importance at best? This is why many Orthodox Jews have no problem with evolution, geological time, etc. Lutherans believe, teach, and confess creationism in the Formula of Concord, and ISTM. Reformed tapdancing and pussyfooting on the issue is relatively modern. Your thoughts?  
[11/4/16 01:55](#)

Daniel C said...

Kirk,

Yes, there are implications for how we view the mechanics of creation. But that is different from saying that the Genesis passages imply empirical scientific investigations to “prove” creation. Scripture is not too concerned with the empirical aspects of creation, so while they are not unimportant, they are not the main focus of the text.

Thus, there is a problem if one sees Genesis 1-11, and immediately thinks of the Creation Museum.

The Formula of Concord does teach a literal creation, but that is not the same as proposing an empirical investigation and proof of creation.

11/4/16 16:23

Kirk Skeptic said...

I would say that Genesis “proves” creation in the same way it “proves” the existence of God; i.e. by authoritatively declaring it so to be. The fact that Genesis is not a “textbook of science” proves nothing because the Bible is not a textbook - period. However, words do mean things, and one can’t get evolution or geological time out of the Genesis narrative, and so we do indeed learn some of the facts of creation. We might not see the Creation Museum, but the AiG folks are a lot closer to Scripture than BioLogos.

BTW if you don’t see the Creation Museum, what do you see?

12/4/16 05:27

Daniel C said...

Kirk,

yes, Genesis “proves” creation, but not in the scientific manner. You do seem to recognize that, so I don’t see your point in disagreeing with me here.

I don’t think anyone who believes in creation thinks that one can “get evolution out of geological time of the Genesis narrative.” But neither do I think that one can get the speciation of the dog-wolf kind, or the genetic entropy rate of human DNA, or the exact geological mechanisms of the Flood, from reading Scripture.

My point is simply to point out empirical, scientific creationism is not taught in Genesis. I think such a field is helpful for those scientifically inclined, but it is not the focus of Genesis.

12/4/16 18:57

Kirk Skeptic said...

Forgive my tardy response, but, given the history of how churches have caved on the issue of creation plus the feckless response to BioLogos, my concern as a layman is warranted. The different models of creation science are just that - models that follow from the facts of Genesis. This would not be the focus of Genesis per se, but does naturally flow therefrom. To ignore this does impinge in the focus vis-a-vis credibility; i.e. if I believe Genesis to be midrash, what do I make of sin and salvation? If I believe Genesis to be history, the rest of orthodox Christianity follows. Unfortunately, the Reformed churches have been lax on creation; we confessional Lutherans have had our share of weasels as well.

15/4/16 09:44

Daniel C said...

Kirk,

that there are many compromisers on the doctrine of creation I admit. But just because of that does not mean that I must react to the other extreme and wed the biblical reading of Genesis to any particular empirical creation science program, no matter how promising any of them looks. The most important part of creation is that it happens plainly, not whether it happens according to a particular empirical scenario hypothesized by creation science.

15/4/16 17:01