

REPORT OF THE CREATION STUDY COMMITTEE to the PCA General Assembly 2010

I. Introductory Statement

We thank our God for the blessings of the last two years. We have profited personally and together by the study of God's Word, discussion and hard work together.

We have found a profound unity among ourselves on the issues of vital importance to our Reformed testimony. We believe that the Scriptures, and hence Genesis 1-3, are the inerrant word of God. We affirm that Genesis 1-3 is a coherent account from the hand of Moses. We believe that *history*, not *myth*, is the proper category for describing these chapters; and furthermore that their history is true. In these chapters we find the record of God's creation of the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*; of the special creation of Adam and Eve as actual human beings, the parents of all humanity (hence they are not the products of evolution from lower forms of life). We further find the account of an historical fall, that brought all humanity into an estate of sin and misery, and of God's sure promise of a Redeemer. Because the Bible is the word of the Creator and Governor of all there is, it is right for us to find it speaking authoritatively to matters studied by historical and scientific research. We also believe that acceptance of, say, non-geocentric astronomy is consistent with full submission to Biblical authority. We recognize that a naturalistic worldview and true Christian faith are impossible to reconcile, and gladly take our stand with Biblical supernaturalism.

The Committee has been unable to come to unanimity over the nature and duration of the creation days. Nevertheless, our goal has been to enhance the unity, integrity, faithfulness and proclamation of the Church. Therefore we are presenting a unanimous report with the understanding that the members hold to different exegetical viewpoints. As to the rest we are at one. It is our hope and prayer that the Church at large can join us in a principled, Biblical recognition of both the unity and diversity we have regarding this doctrine, and that all are seeking properly to understand biblical revelation. It is our earnest desire not to see our beloved church divide over this issue.

VI. Advice and Counsel of the Committee

The Committee reminds the Assembly of the tremendous theological significance of the Biblical doctrine of creation. As Bavinck points out, "The doctrine of creation, affirming the distinction between the Creator and his creature is the starting point of true religion."^[137]

He goes on to say:

There is no existence apart from God, and the Creator can only be known truly through revelation. . . This creation is properly said to be *ex nihilo*, 'out of nothing,' thus preserving the distinction in essence between the Creator and the world and the contingency of the world in its dependence on God.

. . . Creation also means that time has a beginning, only God is eternal. As creatures we are necessarily *in time*, and speculation about pretemporal or extratemporal reality is useless speculation. The purpose and goal of creation is to be found solely in God's will and glory. It is especially in the Reformed tradition that the honor and glory of God was made the fundamental principle of all doctrine and conduct. A doctrine of creation is one of the foundational building blocks of a biblical and Christian worldview.^[138]

The orthodox view includes the following elements: that Scripture is the inerrant Word of God and self-interpreting, the full historicity of Genesis 1-3, the unique creation of Adam and Eve in God's image as our first parents, and Adam as the covenant head of the human race. A necessary corollary of this view is the fact that the curse and the resultant discord in the universe began with the sin of Adam. It is the incomprehensible God who has

revealed himself clearly in nature and in Scripture. He has revealed exactly what He intended, and those areas which are not revealed belong to the Lord our God (Deut 29:29).

There are areas in which there are differences of interpretation of both Scripture and of our Standards, which we need to continue to explore patiently and respectfully before God.

In light of the present diversity regarding the creation doctrine in the PCA., the committee was established to study the exegetical, hermeneutical, and theological interpretations of Genesis 1-3 and the original intent of the Westminster Standards' phrase "in the space of six days," . . . [and to] report. . . its findings, along with its non-binding advice and counsel if any.

As we have studied the history of this matter, reflected in Section II, it is clear that there has been a good deal of diversity of opinion over the issue of the length of the days throughout the history of the Church. It is this kind of diversity that is found in the PCA today. The fact is that the Church, while affirming with one voice the creation of all things visible and invisible by the triune God, has not come to a unity of position on the matter of the nature and length of the days, as she has with regard to such doctrines as the Trinity and the Person of Christ. This indicates that the Westminster divines were correct in their affirmation that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all. . ." (WCF I, 7). We believe that this is the reason that this Committee has not been able to reach unanimity. We have come to a better understanding of each other's views, resulting in a deeper respect for one another's integrity.

We are aware that this is a divisive issue. It is the hope and purpose of the Committee to give advice that could avoid any division of the church. While affirming the above statement of what is involved in an orthodox view of creation, we recognize that good men will differ on some other matters of interpretation of the creation account. We urge the church to recognize honest differences, and join in continued study of the issues, with energy and patience, and with a respect for the views and integrity of each other.

It should be observed that the ordinary courts of jurisdiction for officers in the church are the presbytery for the teaching elders and the session for the ruling elders and deacons. These are the courts that deal with the theological position of the officers, and it is not the prerogative of the Assembly to interfere with the judgments of these courts, except by way of review of the presbytery minutes, or by judicial process.

The advice of some who hold the Calendar Day view is that the General Assembly recognize that the intent of the Westminster divines was the Calendar Day view, and that any other view is an exception to the teaching of the Standards. A court that grants an exception has the prerogative of not permitting the exception to be taught at all. If the individual is permitted to teach his view, he must also agree to present the position of the Standards as the position of the Church.

Others recommend that the Assembly acknowledge that the four views of the interpretation of the days expounded in this report are consistent with the teaching of the Standards on the doctrine of creation, and that those who hold one of these views and who assent to the affirmations listed below should be received by the courts of the church without notations of exceptions to the Standards concerning the doctrine of creation.

The advice of others on the committee is that the PCA has existed for over 25 years with a variety of viewpoints regarding creation being accepted, and a diversity of presbytery and sessional practices. These members of the Committee recognize that it would be disturbing to the Church if the Assembly sought to change the present practice of the Church which has provided for various ways of receiving candidates for office, who make the following affirmations.

All the Committee members join in these affirmations: The Scriptures, and hence Genesis 1-3, are the inerrant word of God. That Genesis 1-3 is a coherent account from the hand of Moses. That *history*, not *myth*, is the proper category for describing these chapters; and furthermore that their history is true. In these chapters we find the record of God's creation of the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo*; of the special creation of Adam and Eve as actual human beings, the parents of all humanity (hence they are not the products of evolution from lower forms of life). We

further find the account of an historical fall, that brought all humanity into an estate of sin and misery, and of God's sure promise of a Redeemer. Because the Bible is the word of the Creator and Governor of all there is, it is right for us to find it speaking authoritatively to matters studied by historical and scientific research. We also believe that acceptance of, say, non-geocentric astronomy is consistent with full submission to Biblical authority. We recognize that a naturalistic worldview and true Christian faith are impossible to reconcile, and gladly take our stand with Biblical supernaturalism.

(The entire document produced by the Study Committee can be found at <http://www.pcahistory.org/creation/report.html#f2>.)