

## WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH IV: 1-2

(Reading: Genesis 1:1-2:3; 2:15-25)

### What God Made

Someone once wrote, “When I was a student at University, I was convinced that the universe ran according to the scientific rules. I believed that the idea of a loving God was a myth.

“In embryology lab we were studying the growth of the chick. Each day our instructor opened one of the twenty-one fertilised eggs in the incubator and carefully removed the living embryo so we could observe the progress of its growth. ‘The heart won’t start beating,’ our instructor explained, ‘until other parts of the circulatory system are ready - about the forty-fourth hour.’

When I returned to study the tiny heart of a forty-four hour chick, the heart had grown. Then it began contracting spasmodically in tiny, fitful tremors. As I watched, the tremors grew stronger, more regular. The heart was beating, pushing blood through the tiny embryo in a movement that would nourish the chick throughout its life.

“I was spellbound by what I had seen take place before my eyes! I thought of the perfect timing. Then, at that moment, a new life began for me. I felt the guiding hand of God upon His universe. This was no scientific machine I had been observing. This was a living act performed by the Creator who cared!”

For her the words of Psalm 139 verse 14 rang out. As David cries out there, “your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

Isn’t this like the song that goes, “All things bright and beautiful, all creatures great and small, all things wise and wonderful, the Lord God made them all.” And He did! That’s what that student and so many others by faith have seen. The words we profess in the Westminster Confession are exactly those we read in the opening chapters of Scripture.

Which more clearer way could the Lord say it? For the Bible begins by stating, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” So, in the words of the first aspect to Chapter 4 of the Westminster Confession, we note that **THE PLAN OF GOD IS ACTIONED BY HIS HAND.**

### **The Plan of God Is Actioned By His Hand**

When we declare in the Confession of Faith that “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world,” that’s only confirming what we read in the first few verses of the Bible. For in addition to the mention of God in verse 1 we have the Spirit hovering over the water in verse 2 and the Word in verse 3.

The world was created. It did not come here on its own. And it’s God, the true God, who made it this way.

Now, that’s quite different from what is taught in state schools as science nowadays. That’s completely opposite to the “theory of evolution”, because that “theory” has not one single shred of evidence. It cannot because if it were true then everything would clearly show it. But more and more scientists are speaking out against it. Even if perhaps they are still far from the true facts, they are realising all this couldn’t have happened by what would have to be the most impossible and obscure chance!

One of these men is Stephen Hawking, the theoretical physicist who is a Professor at Cambridge. In his book, ‘A Brief History of Time’, he unfolds the incredible richness and diversity of God’s

creation. He does this through showing how physics points to a well-ordered creation. And, yet, though allowing for the possibility that the universe was created and designed by God, Hawking doesn't see God as being active in any way since the creation. While the laws that govern our universe may have been decreed by God yet, he says, it appears that God "has since left the universe to evolve according to them and does not intervene in it."

It had to happen sooner or later that Darwinian evolutionism was shown to be false. If it was the genuine science it claimed to be it would have drawn out quite different evidence from analysing the 'book of nature' and the 'book of life'. Because who wrote those books?

For instance, it is a fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. So when a biologist, examining thousands of "other facts", theorises about life while starting with the assumption that no one ever died and then rose again, he's wrong in both ways. He's got the facts wrong and his theory about the facts is wrong. For "science" has noted that various orders of life "formed" through process. But when it theorises from this that life started by itself, and that it directs itself from stage to stage, it's neither scientific or true.

The teaching of Scripture is clear about God creating - and creating through the Three Persons in the Godhead each doing their work. And, then, the teaching of Scripture is quite clear that God creates in His time. Genesis 1:1 begins "in the beginning", and right through chapter 1 and into chapter 2 we are told of definite time periods. So in reflecting Scripture, Article 1 here speaks of "in the beginning" and also uses the phrase, "in the space of six days."

It seems simple enough, doesn't it? Yet it's here that there have come about some of the deepest divisions between conservative reformed-presbyterian believers. It's because of a difference on this that the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches in North America withdrew their support and recognition of Westminster Theological Seminary West.

The difference is between those who hold to a literal six-day-twenty-four-hour creation period and those who say that the creation account gives a framework for what happened, but leaving it open to understand that these periods could have been thousands of years long. The Hebrew word '*yom*' is at the heart of this. This is a word which usually means a twenty-four period but has sometimes been used for longer periods. And tied up with all this is the debate over whether Genesis 1 is poetry or special prose or a parable, or whatever.

Noel Weeks in his book, 'The Sufficiency of Scripture' deals with these different arguments. In a thorough, consistent way, he concludes, "In the absence of any Biblical evidence to the contrary, and in the presence of frequent references to the narrative as historical narrative, the obvious way to read Genesis 1 is the obvious way. It is impossible for God to use a misleading form of description.

"Those who advocate a limited doctrine of scriptural authority sometimes claim that the Scripture has factual, scientific, and historical errors, but will not mislead the person who follows it. We can turn that very argument back on them. If Genesis 1 was not meant to be taken as a literal account, why was it written that way?"

God creates in His time. And built into that creation was time, because Adam was created as an adult male. And we should understand the same for the rest of creation. It had built-in age. However God decided to do that.

And then, let's note, God creates it all good. There's no escaping this, even today long after the fall. So there was no moral evil in the universe. The idea that there has always been the dual

principles of good and bad, or that the physical things are inherently evil, is clearly wrong. God created it good - and to be enjoyed!

And because we are naturally interested as to what that kind of good world would have been like, there have been many interesting discussions about what it was like living before the fall. Exactly how different was it then?

One subject that comes up is whether or not we were vegetarians then. In Genesis 1, the verses 29 and 30, it speaks about mankind and the animals being given every green plant for food. It seems quite a contrast from the interdependent, predatory world we live in now - the world where death is part-and-parcel of life. And yet there's no real evidence apart from the position that death in the human family is the consequence of sin. Romans 5 verse 12 tells us that with death coming to all men through Adam.

What we do know is that after each of the first five days of creation God declared His work "good". And then, after the sixth day, He went even further. For what He said then was that it was all "very good".

It is at this point we move into Article 2. From realising THE PLAN OF GOD IS ACTIONED BY HIS HAND in Article 1, we now see THE IMAGE OF GOD IS MADE TO RULE HIS LAND.

### **The Image Of God is Made To Rule His Land**

When it comes to the sixth day in creation, God has moved to the apex of His work. For man is the height of creation. Here is the one creature to which a soul was added. Here is the one creature which became living when the divine breath was breathed into a lifeless clay body. So man is essentially an embodied spirit. And don't we so much know that as those whose bodies will be raised at the end of this age?

In the reign of Theodosius the Great, a Roman Emperor of the East, a violent rebellion occurred at Antioch, because he had added another tax. In the heat of that commotion, the people broke down the statue of the deceased Empress Flacilla. That sent the Emperor into a great rage. He immediately sent forces to the city to completely destroy it.

When the herald came and told this to the citizens, one Macedonius, a wise monk, sent to the herald this answer: "Tell the Emperor these words - that he is not only an emperor, but also a man. Therefore let him not only look on his empire, but also on himself. For he, being a man, commands also those who are men. Let him not, then, use men so barbarously, who were made in the image of God. He is angry, and that justly, because the bronze image of his wife has been insultingly abused. And shall not the King of Heaven be angry to see His glorious image in man insultingly handled? O what a difference there is between the reasonable soul and the brazen image! We, for this image are able to set up a hundred. But he is not able to set up a single hair of these men again, if he kill them."

When those words were told to the Emperor he got the point. He suppressed his anger, and drew back his forces.

Mankind is the height of creation. In Genesis 1 verse 27 it says, "God created man in his own image." And in Genesis 2 verse 7 it says, "And the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living creature."

Our lives were never lived on some mere animal level. Human life is very far from that of the presumed "cave man" at the beginning. In fact, man originally had a much more perfect knowledge and a higher moral character than he ever had since the fall. When it says in Article 2

that man was “endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness” we see why there was the closest communion with God and why He could and did rule on God’s behalf. Ecclesiastes 7 verse 29 says that “God made man upright.” Mankind began with what Romans 2 verse 15 calls “the law written upon their hearts.”

This is not to say that mankind knows more these days, but we cannot know it perfectly. As G.I. Williamson pictures it, “A man who could look for many years out of a dirty window might learn more than another man who looked out of an open door for a day. But there is no doubt as to who would see more clearly. Adam’s knowledge might be more “primitive” in that it was less technical and composite. But it was certainly not primitive in the sense that evolutionary dogma would have us think.”

So man is also the light in creation. As he was originally created he stood out in a special way as a witness to the LORD God. But it was that very distinctiveness that made the fall possible, because there was what the Confession calls “the possibility of transgressing.” A possibility that was specifically shown in Genesis 2 verse 17 with the command “you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

Would man under testing acknowledge God as his King or turn aside? The choice was there. Why it was there is not for us to question. It was there. And man had every possible resource to pass the test. He had “knowledge, righteousness and holiness.”

In other words, mankind as he was originally created was a prophet, priest, and a king. He showed then what Christ Jesus would later fulfil. He proved that man in the right has creation. Adam as a prophet had the physical senses and mental ability to learn the truth. And Adam as a priest possessed the sensibility and desire to worship God in true holiness. And as a king he had the physical and mental power and ability to subject in righteousness everything to the purpose and will of God.

In Adam Psalm 8 was true. Though we naturally take this psalm as a messianic prophecy yet consider who it also sounds like, for the verses 3 till 6 say, “When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. You made him ruler over the works of our hands; you put everything under his feet.”

You could say this about Adam, couldn’t you? But there is a difference. A difference Hebrews 2 verse 9 points out, for it says that “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

In what the second Adam did perfectly we see what the first Adam did have. And what he had every opportunity of keeping, if he but obeyed. What Adam lost is what we now in Christ have re-found. When the Confession speaks of the happiness mankind originally had in their communion with God that’s what we have restored by faith.

And then we are stunned and awed by His work of creation. In the words of Jonathan Edwards, “The enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. These are but shadows - God is the substance. These are but scattered beams - God is the sun. These are but streams - God is the ocean!”

This is what was there at creation. And now by God's work in Christ we have it in His recreation! As one song goes, "In the stars His handiwork I see, on the wind He speaks with majesty, though He ruleth over land and sea, what is that to me? I will celebrate Nativity, for it has a place in history, sure, He came to set His people free, what is that to me? Till in Scripture I saw His true face and I felt the wonder of His grace, then I knew that he was more than just a God who didn't care, that lived away out there, and now He walks beside me day by day ever watching o'er me lest I stray, helping me to find the narrow way, He's ev'rything to me."