

BECAUSE IT HAD NOT RAINED

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THERE are no signs that the debate over the chronological data of Genesis 1 is abating. Among those who hold biblical views of the inspiration of the Scriptures certain interpretations of that chronology have, indeed, long been traditional. These may disagree as to the duration of the "days" of Genesis 1 but they have in common the opinion that the order of narration in that chapter coincides with the actual sequence of creation history. Although these traditional interpretations continue to be dominant in orthodox circles there also continues to be debate and its flames have recently been vigorously fanned by the bellows of the dissenters.¹

At the heart of the issue, though its crucial character appears to be generally overlooked is the question of whether the *modus operandi* of divine providence was the same during the creation era as that of ordinary providence now. This is not to raise the question of whether Genesis 1 leaves the door open for some sort of evolutionary reconstruction. On the contrary, it is assumed here that Genesis 1 contradicts the idea that an undifferentiated world-stuff evolved into the present variegated universe by dint of intrinsic potentialities whether divinely "triggered" or otherwise. According to Genesis 1, the divine act of absolute beginning--or creation *in nihilum*--was followed by a succession of divine acts of origination, both *ex nihilo* and *intra aliquid*.² The present

¹Two discussions in particular have evoked animated reactions among evangelicals in this country: B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, 1954), pp. 173 ff. and N. H. Ridderbos, *Is There A Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?* (Grand Rapids, 1957).

²*In nihilum* serves to distinguish the initial creative act as alone having had no setting of prior created reality. *Intra aliquid* has the advantage over *ex materia* (for productions like that of Adam's body out of existent dust) that it does not obscure the pure creativeness of the divine act. There should be no hesitation in classifying such works as creation in the strict sense. The opinion that Calvin refused to do so is mistaken. (*Cf.* the criticism of B. B. Warfield on this point by J. Murray in "Calvin's Doctrine

world with the fulness thereof is the net result of this succession of discrete creation acts of God completed within the era of the "six days" (Gen. 2:1-3).³

Though this closed era of the "six days" was characteristically the era of creation, it was not exclusively so. That is, the works of creation were interlaced with the work of providence --in a manner analogous to the mingling of natural and supernatural providence in the structure of subsequent history.⁴ As a matter of fact, one aspect of the creative acts themselves (excepting the act of absolute beginning) may properly be subsumed under the rubric of providence. They were works of providence in that they were part of the divine government of the world in so far as that world was already existent before each new creative act occurred. In the discussion which follows, however, predications made concerning the *modus*

of Creation", *WTJ* XVII, 1954, pp. 29 ff.). Calvin does on occasion insist that the word "create" be restricted to *ex nihilo* fiat. Thus, in commenting on the use of the word "create" in Gen. 1:21 for the origin of creatures of sea and air, which Calvin interprets (mistakenly) as having involved the use of existent water, he accounts for this usage solely on the ground that the material employed belonged to the universal matter created *ex nihilo* on the first "day". However, in such a passage it must be observed that Calvin is exclusively concerned with the precise meaning of the Hebrew word **בָּרָא** not at all with the general theological use of the word "create".

³ There have been acts of creation since the creation of man which terminated the era of the "six days"; cf., e. g., the origin of souls and such miracles as the multiplying of the loaves and fishes. None of these, however, has added to the "kinds" originated within the "six days".

⁴ Cf. B. B. Warfield, "Christian Supernaturalism" in *Studies in Theology* (New York, 1932), pp. 37 ff. The likeness of creation acts to subsequent supernatural acts is profound. They are alike highways to consummation. It is by the road of his successive creation acts that God has betaken himself to the Sabbath of the seventh "day". In the sequel, it is by the way of supernaturalism that God directs his image-bearer to union with him in his consummation rest. Adam wakes to the supernatural voice and it is to him from the very beginning a voice that speaks to him out of God's Sabbath, challenging him with the invitation, "Come up hither"--to consummation. And every supernatural word thereafter issues from and beckons covenant-man unto that same Sabbath dwelling-place of God, while every supernatural work propels him towards it. The redemptive principle becomes necessary in the supernaturalism that conducts fallen man to consummation rest and it is, therefore, prominent in biblical revelation; but it is nevertheless subordinate to the eschatological thrust that marks all supernaturalism.

operandi of divine providence during the creation era will have in view only the work of God other than his acts of creation.

The traditionalist interpreter, as he pursues his strictly chronological way through the data of Genesis 1, will be compelled at one point or another to assume that God in his providential preservation of the world during the "six days" era did not operate through secondary means in the manner which men now daily observe and analyze as natural law. The question, therefore, is whether the Scriptures justify this traditional assumption of supernatural providence for the creation era or whether they contradict it--or whether possibly they leave it an open question. It will be the central contention of this article that a clear answer to that question is available in Gen. 2:5 and that that answer constitutes a decisive word against the traditional interpretation.

GENESIS 2:5ff.

The major English versions exhibit marked divergence in the way they translate Gen. 2:5 and relate it grammatically to verses 4 and 6-7.

<i>Authorized</i>	<i>American Revised</i>	<i>Revised Standard</i>
<p>(4) These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, (5) and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. (6) But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. (7) And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground ...</p>	<p>(4) These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Jehovah God made earth and heaven. (5) And no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Jehovah God had not caused it to rain upon the earth: and there was not a man to till the ground; (6) but there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. (7) And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground ...</p>	<p>(4) These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, (5) when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up--for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; (6) but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground --(7) then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground ...</p>

Of these versions the treatment of verse 5 in the ARV is alone acceptable. A Hebrew idiom for expressing an emphatic negative found in the original of this verse has been muffed by the AV with the result that it is obscure at best. The RSV like the ARV correctly renders the negative element but has other serious defects. It treats verse 5 as though it were part of an involved temporal section extending from 4b through 6, all subordinated to the action of verse 7. This is an old interpretation which Delitzsch properly rejected because it required "a clumsy interpolated period" such as is "not to be expected in this simple narrative style".⁵ The RSV rendering would also compel Genesis 2 to teach that man was created before vegetation, whereas the ARV permits the exegete to regard the arrangement of its contents as topical rather than chronological. If the arrangement of Genesis 2 were not topical it would contradict the teaching of Genesis 1 (not to mention that of natural revelation) that vegetation preceded man on the earth.⁶

Set against the vast background of creation history, these verses serve to bring together man and the vegetable world in the foreground of attention. This prepares for the central role of certain objects of the vegetable kingdom, i. e., the Garden of God and especially the trees in the midst of it, in the earliest history of man as recorded in the immediately following verses (cf. 2:8ff. and 3:1ff.).

Verse 5 itself describes a time when the earth was without vegetation. And the significant fact is a very simple one. It is the fact that an explanation--a perfectly natural explanation - is given for the absence of vegetation at that time: "for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth". The Creator did not originate plant life on earth before he had prepared an environment in which he might preserve it without by-passing secondary means and without having recourse to extraordinary means such as marvellous methods of fertilization. The unargued presupposition of Gen. 2:5 is clearly that the divine providence was operating during the

⁵ *New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh, 1888) I, p. 115. Cf. W. H. Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis* (New York, 1910), p. 25.

⁶ That much is deducible from Gen. 1:26-30 whatever one's view of the chronological character of the order of narration in Genesis 1 as a whole.

creation period through processes which any reader would recognize as normal in the natural world of his day.

The last clause of verse 5 cites as a second reason for the lack of vegetation the absence of men. Though there be no rainfall, if man is present "to till the ground" and, in particular, to construct a system of artificial irrigation, he can make the desert blossom as the rose.⁷ The effect of this last clause of Gen. 2:5 is to confirm and strengthen the principle that normal providential procedure characterized the creation era.⁸

Verses 6 and 7 then correspond respectively to the two clauses in verse 5b and relate how the environmental deficiencies there cited were remedied. First, "flooding waters"⁹

⁷ This verse reflects conditions in the East where irrigation is of the essence of farming and distinct terms are found to distinguish land that is naturally irrigated from land that is artificially irrigated. Cf. T. H. Gaster, *Thespis* (New York, 1950), pp. 123, 126.

⁸ If the view of some exegetes were adopted that the sphere of Gen. 2:5 is limited to such cultivated plants as were found in the Garden of Eden, the concept of providential operations involved would remain the same. The text would still affirm that at a point prior to the creation of man and, therefore, within the creation era the absence of certain natural products was attributable to the absence of the natural means for their providential preservation. It may here be added that this avoidance of unnecessary supernaturalism in providence during the "six days" accords well with the analogy of subsequent divine providence for the latter too is characterized by a remarkable economy in its resort to the supernatural.

⁹ The meaning of the Hebrew word **טַבַּחַת** is uncertain. It probably denotes subterranean waters which rise to the surface and thence as gushing springs or flooding rivers inundate the land. The watering of the Garden of Eden by a river in the immediate sequel (v. 10) may be intended as a specific localized instance of the **טַבַּחַת** phenomena (v. 6). Note the similar advance in the case of man, viewed in verse 5b as the artificial irrigator, from the general statement of verse 7 to the specific assignment in the Garden (vs. 8, 15). The word **טַבַּחַת** appears elsewhere in the Old Testament only in Job 36:27. That passage is also difficult; but **טַבַּחַת** there seems to denote the underground ore, as it were, from which the raindrops are extracted and refined, i. e., by the process of evaporation in the cycle of cloud formation and precipitation. (For the translation of the preposition **מֵ** as "from" see C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Manual* (Rome 1955), p. 75). The Hebrew **-in** is probably to be derived from the Akkadian *edu*, a Sumerian loanword which denotes overflowing waters. (Cf. E. Speiser, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 140 (1955), pp. 9-11). Other views are that it comes from Akkadian *id*, "river", also a Sumerian loanword (used in the

began to rise from the earth and watered all the face of the ground" (v. 6). Here was a source of natural irrigation to compensate for the want of rain. The first verb is a Hebrew imperfect and the inceptive nuance--"began to"--is legitimate for that form and is required in this case if verse 6 is not to neutralize the first clause in verse 5b. The English versions of verse 6 convey the impression that there was an ample watering of the earth during the very time which verse 5 describes. If that were so, the explanatory statement of verse 5, "for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth", would be stranded as an irrelevance. Actually, verse 6 reports the emergence of a new natural phenomenon, the necessary preliminary to the creation of the florae described in verse 5a.

Verse 7 then records the creation of man. With adequate natural irrigation already available, the mere preservation of vegetation does not require man's husbandry. But its full horticultural exploitation does. Besides, the mention of man at this point need not be accounted for solely in terms of his services to the vegetable kingdom for he was not made for it but it for him.

GENESIS 2:5ff. AND THE INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1

Embedded in Gen. 2:5ff. is the principle that the *modus operandi* of the divine providence was the same during the creation period as that of ordinary providence at the present time. It is now to be demonstrated that those who adopt the traditional approaches cannot successfully integrate this revelation with Genesis 1 as they interpret it.

In contradiction to Gen. 2:5, the twenty-four-hour day theory must presuppose that God employed other than the ordinary secondary means in executing his works of providence. To take just one example, it was the work of the "third day" that the waters should be gathered together into

Mari texts as the name of the river god) or from *Ida*, the name of a high mountain in central Crete (a tentative suggestion of C. H. Gordon in "Homer and Bible", *Hebrew Union College Annual XXVI* (1955), pp. 62, 63).

seas and that the dry land should appear and be covered with vegetation (Gen. 1:9-13). All this according to the theory in question transpired within twenty-four hours. But continents just emerged from under the seas do not become thirsty land as fast as that by the ordinary process of evaporation. And yet according to the principle revealed in Gen. 2:5 the process of evaporation in operation at that time was the ordinary one.

The results, indeed, approach the ludicrous when it is attempted to synchronize Gen. 2:5 with Genesis 1 interpreted in terms of a week of twenty-four-hour days. On that interpretation, vegetation was created on what we may call "Tuesday". Therefore, the vegetationless situation described in Gen. 2:5 cannot be located later than "Tuesday" morning. Neither can it be located earlier than that for Gen. 2:5 assumes the existence of dry land which does not appear until the "third day". Besides, would it not have been droll to attribute the lack of vegetation to the lack of water either on "Sunday" when the earth itself was quite unfashioned or on "Monday" when there was nothing but water to be seen? Hence the twenty-four-hour day theorist must think of the Almighty as hesitant to put in the plants on "Tuesday" morning because it would not rain until later in the day! (It must of course be supposed that it did rain, or at least that some supply of water was provided, before "Tuesday" was over, for by the end of the day the earth was abounding with that vegetation which according to Gen. 2:5 had hitherto been lacking for want of water.)

How can a serious exegete fail to see that such a reconstruction of a "Tuesday morning" in a literal creation week is completely foreign to the historical perspectives of Gen. 2:5? It is a strange blindness that questions the orthodoxy of all who reject the traditional twenty-four-hour day theory when the truth is that endorsement of that theory is incompatible with belief in the self-consistency of the Scriptures.

But any strictly chronological interpretation of Genesis 1, even if the "days" are regarded as ages, forces the exegete inescapably into conflict with the principle disclosed in Gen. 2:5. The traditional day-age theorist must, for example, imagine that during the creation era plants and trees flourished on the face of an earth spinning alone through a sunless,

moonless, starless void. Now it will be recognized that that is not ordinary botanical procedure - and yet Gen. 2:5 takes for granted ordinary botanical procedure.

In the vain attempt to avoid such a reconstruction, according to which vegetation (product of the "third day") thrives without benefit of the sun (product of the "fourth day"), the most unwarranted notions of the work of the "fourth day" have been substituted for the straightforward statements of the text. Gen. 1:14-19 declares that the heavenly bodies were on the "fourth day" created and set in their familiar positions. Moses is certainly not suggesting merely that hitherto hidden heavenly bodies now became visible on earth. He knew how to express such an idea in Hebrew if that had been his intent (cf. his account of the appearance of the continents from under the seas, v. 9). The very least that transpired on the "day" in question is that the sun was brought into a radically new relationship to the earth wherein it began to govern earth's times and seasons and in general to affect life on earth as men now observe it to do. But the strictly chronological view of Genesis 1, even with such a minimizing exegesis of the "fourth day", must still suppose that prior to this re-ordering of the universe on the "fourth day", plant life had flourished on the earth contrary to present natural law.

On this traditional reconstruction it is impossible to make sense of Gen. 2:5. Surely if vegetation could have flourished without the sun it could have survived without rain. Laws quite unlike any we know would then have prevailed. For that matter, God could have preserved forests in space without so much as roots in a dry earth. It would then, however, be completely irrelevant for Gen. 2:5 to assign natural reasons for the absence of vegetation. Indeed, the very fact that it offered a perfectly natural explanation would bring Gen. 2:5 into principal contradiction to Genesis 1.

To the divisive higher critic this might mean only that there is another item to add to his list of alleged contradictions between the two variant creation accounts he supposes he has discovered in Genesis 1 and 2. But the orthodox exegete, having been confronted with the evidence of ordinary providential procedure in Genesis 2:5 will be bound to reject the rigidly chronological interpretations of Genesis 1 for the reason

that they necessarily presuppose radically different providential operations for the creation period.

If Gen. 2:5 obviates certain traditional interpretations of Genesis 1, by the same token it validates the not so traditional interpretation which regards the chronological framework of Genesis 1 as a figurative representation of the time span of creation and judges that within that figurative framework the data of creation history have been arranged according to other than strictly chronological considerations.

To be sure, certain features are found in their proper relative positions chronologically. But where that is so it must be determined by factors other than the order of narration. It is perfectly obvious, for example, that the rest of the "seventh day", expressive of the divine joy in creation consummated, must follow chronologically the creation labors themselves. Again, the implications of man's position as lord of creation, the scope of the cultural mandate, and other considerations require that the creation of man concluded the creative acts of God in the actual historical sequence as well as in the order of narration.

Nevertheless, Genesis 2:5 forbids the conclusion that the order of narration is exclusively chronological. The rationale of the arrangement involves other factors. To some extent a topical approach informs the account. As has been frequently observed, a succession of correspondences emerges when the contents of "days" one to three are laid alongside the contents of "days" four to six. Another literary interest at work within this parallelism is that of achieving climax, as is done, for example, in introducing man after all other creatures as their king.

Of greater significance for the life of man than these merely literary devices is the Sabbathic pattern of the over-all structure of Gen. 1:1-2:3. For the Creator's way in the day that he made the earth and the heavens must be the way, of his image-bearer also. The precise ratio of man's work to his rest is a matter of following the chronological structure of the revelation in which God was pleased to record his creation triumph. The aeons of creation history could have been divided into other than six periods. For temporally the "days" are not of equal length (*cf.*, *e. g.*, the seventh "day"

which is everlasting), and logically the infinitely diversified creative works were susceptible of analysis into other than six divisions. But the Creator in his wisdom, adapting the proportions of the ordinance, it would seem, to the constitutional needs of man, chose to reveal his creative acts in terms of six "days" of work followed by a seventh "day" of rest.

The divine demand for human imitation inherent in the Sabbathic pattern of that revelation becomes articulate in the fourth word of the decalogue. The comparison there drawn between the divine original and the human copy is fully satisfied by the facts that in each case there is the Sabbathic principle and the six-one ratio. The argument that Genesis 1 must be strictly chronological because man's six days of labor follow one another in chronological succession forces the analogy unnecessarily. The logic of such argument would not allow one to stop short of the conclusion that the creation "days" must all have been of equal duration and twenty-four hours at that.

THE LITERARY GENRE OF GENESIS 1

Quite apart from the evidence of Gen. 2:5 the figurative framework interpretation of Genesis 1 which it demands would commend itself to us above the traditional interpretations. Only brief mention will be made here of other lines of evidence since it is the main burden of this article to center attention on Gen. 2:5 whose decisive import for the Genesis 1 problem has (to the writer's knowledge) been hitherto unappreciated.

The literary character of Gen. 1:1-2:3 prepares the exegete for the presence there of a stronger figurative element than might be expected were it ordinary prose. This passage is not, of course, full-fledged Semitic poetry. But neither is it ordinary prose. Its structure is strophic and throughout the strophes many refrains echo and re-echo. Instances occur of other poetic features like parallelism (1:27; 2:2) and alliteration (1:1). In general then the literary treatment of the creation in Genesis 1 is in the epic tradition.

Having made such an observation concerning the literary

genre of the creation record, it is imperative (especially in the present theological scene) that one convinced of the genuinely historical nature of the events recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis promptly add that the disregard for historical truth associated with the usual epic is not imported along with the formal literary aspects of the epic style into the divine revelation. Such importation was no more inevitable than that the polytheism of pre-biblical psalmody, for example, must have been carried over with the religious lyric form into the biblical Psalter. Though Genesis 1 be epic in literary style, its contents are not legendary or mythical in either a Liberal or Barthian sense. The semi-poetic style, however, should lead the exegete to anticipate the figurative strand in this genuinely historical record of the origins of the universe.

It also needs considerable emphasis, even among orthodox exegetes, that specific evidence is required for identifying particular elements in the early chapters of Genesis as literary figures. The semi-poetic form of Genesis 1 does not make it an exception. Exegesis which disregards this degenerates into allegorizing and these chapters are not allegories.

The specific exegetical evidence for the figurative character of the several chronological terms in Genesis 1 has been repeatedly cited. The word "day" must be figurative because it is used for the eternity during which God rests from his creative labors. The "day's" subordinate elements, "evening" and "morning", must be figurative for they are mentioned as features of the three "days" before the text records the creation of those lights in the firmament of heaven which were to divide the day from the night. (From the position taken in this article the last argument is, of course, only *ad hominem*. But on the other hand, if the validity of the interpretation advocated here is recognized, the figurative nature of the "evenings" and "mornings" follows with equal necessity.)

Purely exegetical considerations, therefore, compel the conclusion that the divine author has employed the imagery of an ordinary week to provide a figurative chronological framework for the account of his creative acts. And if it is a figurative week then it is not a literal week of twenty-four-hour days. Furthermore, once the figurative nature of the chronological pattern is appreciated the literalness of the sequence is

no more sacrosanct than the literalness of the duration of the days in this figurative week.

Whether the events narrated occurred in the order of their narration would, as far as the chronological framework of Genesis 1 is concerned, be an open exegetical question. The question is actually closed in favor of the non-chronological interpretation by the exegetical evidence of Gen. 2:5. But if the exegete did not have the light of Gen. 2:5, he would certainly be justified in turning to natural revelation for possible illumination of the question left open by special revelation. And surely natural revelation concerning the sequence of developments in the universe as a whole and the sequence of the appearance of the various orders of life on our planet (unless that revelation has been completely misinterpreted) would require the exegete to incline to a not exclusively chronological interpretation of the creation week.

The exegete could then find confirmation of this view in the evidence of a topical interest in the arrangement of Genesis 1 and in the non-chronological mode of representing history which is certainly common enough elsewhere in Scripture. He might also well observe the likeness between Moses' record of the creation "week" and certain visions of John, the seer of the Apocalypse, which are heptad in structure with successively numbered divisions and yet are not strictly chronological in sequence. It appears that the God of revelation chose to reveal the primeval ages of creation and the eschatological ages of re-creation in similar literary form.

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