

The Clarity of Scripture As It Affects The Message Of The Church (With Application To The Creation Account)

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In the spring of this year your District Committee on Convention Essays approached me on the matter of giving a short essay on the nature of the creation days at this 1974 Minnesota District Convention. It was my assumption that this request was suggested and prompted by the part which the nature of the creation days had played in the supplementary report of the Commission on Doctrinal Matters to the 1973 convention of our synod. This report had stated that in discussions, held during the previous month between our Doctrinal Commission and the representatives of the Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (SELK) the nature of the creation days had been one of the vital matters on which final agreement had been reached by all participants. It was likewise reported that the Commission would now be awaiting confirmation also of this agreement! regarding the nature of the creation days, on the part of the entire administrative council of SELK and finally of this church body as a whole, when it would be assembled in its next convention.

The Doctrinal Commission's report, at the same time indicated why the nature of the creation days had attained such prominence in the discussions with the SELK representatives.. It was a test as to whether we were really agreed on the doctrine of the authority of the Holy Scriptures, its inerrancy and its clarity. It was a test whether when faced with a very practical question our two church bodies would be able to apply the truth of the clarity of Scripture in the same way. A true understanding of scriptural authority and inerrancy always presupposes the truth of the clarity of Scripture. It is obvious, of course, that it is the worldwide impact of the unscriptural theory of evolution which is making the creation account of Scripture, also what it says concerning the nature of the creation days, a current practical problem. What is really vital, however, is whether in facing this problem we really cling to the clarity of Scripture. For when heading the creation account of Scripture and what it says about the creation days, we are willing to leave the truth of the clarity of Scripture out of consideration and forget all about it, then we no longer have any assurance that we will be ready to hold on to the truth of the clarity of Scripture when other truths and statements of Scripture are being contested. Hence, nothing less than the gospel itself is finally at stake.

In your perusal of the *Report to the Ten Districts*, which is the main program of this district convention, you will have noticed that the Commission on Inter-Church Relations—the Doctrinal Commission under its new name—has continued to keep the matter of the nature of the creation days in the context of the vital truth of the clarity of Scripture. The report of the Commission informs you that it has not been fully satisfied with the wording in which the administrative council of SELK expressed its endorsement of the agreement reached in last year's discussion at Mequon. The Commission felt compelled, therefore, to address a new question to SELK to allay the fear that the matter of the nature of the creation days may 'after all have been turned into an open question by the SELK council's wording of endorsement. Yet what is noteworthy is this that in addressing its new question to the SELK council the Commission again states: "This question is of highest importance for us, for it involves the external clarity of Scripture." It was the same consideration which led me to suggest to your Essay Committee: If I am to give an essay on the creation account and on the nature of the creation days I feel that this topic should be kept in the context of the clarity of Scripture. This accounts for what may appear to be a rather cumbersome wording of the essay topic that I will be presenting to you: *The Clarity Of Scripture As It Affects The Message Of The Church (With Application To The Creation Account)*.

The Involvement of the Clarity of Scripture in the Message of the Church

The message which Christ's church is to proclaim is sometimes simply stated in Scripture as being the gospel. Our risen and victorious Lord and Savior said to His believers: "Go ye into all, the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). To the Romans Paul as the called apostle of the church writes (1:15) that he is ready to preach the gospel to them that are at Rome also. He tells them that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth. In parting from the elders

at Ephesus (Ac 20: 24) Paul states that in his ministry in Christ's church, which he had received of the Lord Jesus, he was "to testify the gospel or the grace of God." He told the Corinthians (1 Co 2) that he was determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Still, Paul also pointed out to the elders at Ephesus (Ac 20:27) that he had not neglected to declare all the counsel of God to them. He directed Timothy to the Holy Scriptures as able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. He then stressed that the Scriptures, all inspired by God, were the comprehensive equipment of the man of God, the minister of Christ's church, to fit him fully for all branches of his work.

Both the gospel and the entire Scriptures can therefore be designated as the message of the church and of its ministry. This is possible because all Scripture stands in the service of its central message of God's grace in Christ Jesus, the message of the gospel. This is true even of the Scripture's important message of the law. The law, too, properly proclaimed by the church, stands in the service of the gospel, both before and after conversion. As far as the unregenerate are concerned, the only express purpose for which the church is to proclaim the law is that of bringing them to the knowledge of their sins and of thus preparing them for the comforting proclamation of the gospel. The church cannot, of course, control the effect of its law preaching in those exposed to its testimony. If it effects mere outward reform and civic righteousness this is, however, a by-product and not a part of the church's mission. To those who have already come to faith in Christ the church is to preach the law as a mirror, curb, and guide, yet only in the interest of the edification of the believers in Christian faith and life. The preaching of the law cannot, of course, effect anything positive, supply any motivation, but is necessary because of the Christian's Old Adam.

To remain a proper part of the message of the ministry, every truth and statement of Scripture must constantly be kept in context with the central gospel message. As soon as any truth or statement of Scripture is wholly divorced from its relation to the gospel and no longer stands in its service, it ceases to be a proper part of the proclamation of the Christian ministry. This is something that must constantly be emphasized in our day when many attempts are being made to widen the message and mission of the church to pertain to the total needs of man. It must be emphasized our day when many fail to distinguish between the actual entrusted mission of the church and the tasks and obligations of Christians in human society for which the church indeed supplies the proper Christian motivation but not detailed direction.

The message of Christ's church is essentially God's message of salvation. It is *Heilsgeschichte*, salvation history in the true sense. Yet it is not *Heilsgeschichte* in the perverted sense as understood by many modern theologians. They teach *Heilsgeschichte* as though it consisted in the human reflections of religious geniuses with extraordinary religious insights concerning what they regard to be God's saving acts in behalf of mankind. That is why they also hold that these reflections must be modified and updated by every new generation in accordance with man's gradually expanding understanding.

No, the message of Christ's church is God's own account of His saving intervention in behalf of fallen mankind, His own authoritative interpretation of His saving activity in behalf of sinful man ever since the fall, of His saving activity as it culminated in the finished redemption of His incarnate Son Jesus Christ; and in His victorious exaltation as the Lord and Savior of all. The message of the church is God's own gracious and effective offer of all the fruits of this redemption, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This message of the church comes to us, by direct divine revelation. We have that revelation in the Holy Scriptures, which were written by God's chosen instruments in human language, but which are the inspired and inerrant Word of God in all that they say. Yet all of Scripture stands in the service of the gospel message entrusted to the church.

These Holy Scriptures assert clarity for themselves. Only because Scripture possesses clarity, only because it is able to convey and impart its divine message can the psalmist in the 119th Psalm speak of it as a lamp unto his feet and as a light unto his path. A Scripture that lacks objective clarity cannot serve as a guiding lamp upon a treacherous path, nor can it serve as a helpful light in the midst of gross spiritual darkness. The psalter particularly abounds with statements affirming the clarity of Scripture. Psalm 19:7-8 states, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." In Psalm 94:12 we read: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law." In the

118th Psalm, verses 104 and 130, we are told, “Through thy precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. The entrance of thy words give us light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.” Only because the Word of God, the Holy Scripture, possesses clarity can it make wise, impart blessedness, move us to hate every false way, and give understanding to the simple.

Through the Apostle Peter we have an equally explicit assertion of the clarity of Scripture. He says, (2 Pe 1:19): “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn and the daystar arise in our hearts.” In eternity God’s children will no longer walk by faith but by sight. Until judgment day, however, the Scriptures are the one illuminating light to which they are to give close heed.. Yet a word that in itself lacks clarity; that needs an interpreter, a word to which someone else must first give clarity could not serve as an illuminating light. Earlier we already considered how the Apostle Paul reminded Timothy: “From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tt 3:15). In this reminder there is a definite assertion of the clarity of Scripture. The Scripture had come to Timothy, as a child without benefit of any profound Jewish interpreters. The Scripture had been presented to him by his mother and grandmother, simple, common people; yet, by virtue of its own clarity this Scripture had imparted full wisdom unto salvation. This is written also for our learning, we are considering, the message of the church. Scripture clearly sets forth all that we need to know for our salvation. That is why it is able to make people wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Probably even more abundantly Scripture asserts its clarity by simply presupposing it as a self-evident fact in various situations. In the Savior’s story of the rich man and poor Lazarus, Abraham counters the rich man’s plea that Lazarus be sent from beyond the grave to enlighten his five living brothers, with the statement: “They have Moses and the prophets. Let them hear them.” This clearly implies that these Old Testament Scriptures clearly present everything that the brothers needed to know in order to prepare them for a blessed eternity. In John 5:32 Jesus encouraged His Jewish hearers in their searching of the Scriptures. He asserted that they would indeed find life eternal thereby because the Scriptures testified of Him as their Savior. Such encouragement would be meaningless without a Scripture that is clear. The Bereans, as we are told in Acts 17:11, though just ordinary members of a Christian congregation, carefully compared everything that Paul had preached to them with what they themselves found in their diligent searching of the Scriptures. They believed that the Scriptures were clear; by commending their activity and designating it as noble, Paul likewise asserted the clarity of Scripture.

Every admonition of Scripture to beware of false prophets (Mt 7:15) and to mark those who depart from apostolic teachings (Rm 16:17), every exhortation to hold fast the form of sound Word (2 Tm 1:13), and to hold fast the faithful Word (Tt 1:9) that by sound doctrine the gainsayers might be exhorted, presuppose a Scripture which is clear. This clarity is also asserted in every earnest warning against adding anything to God’s inspired Word or against subtracting anything from it (Dt 4:2, Re 22:18.19, Mt 5:19). How could anyone know whether he was adding or subtracting if Scripture were not clear? Jesus states (Jn 8:31) that we are His disciples indeed as we continue in His Word. This again implies that He has given us a clear Word, so that it is possible to know whether we are continuing in it or not.

The Nature of the Clarity of Scripture

The clarity which Scripture ascribes to itself is, first of all, an outward clarity. It consists in this that in the words and sentences of intelligible, comprehensible human language Scripture clearly expresses all the truths which God has been pleased to reveal, to us and which we need to know for our Christian faith and life now and for our eternal salvation hereafter. Because of the human language of Scripture many have doubted and continue to doubt its divine nature. Our reaction should rather be that of thanking God, however, for the miracle of His grace that for our benefit He chose to reveal all of His gracious truths to us through the medium of lucid human language which we can understand.

Any rational being who reads and studies the statements of Holy Scripture, who carefully marks and notes the meaning of the words which Scripture employs, the grammatical construction with which these words

are joined together in sentences, the figures of speech, simile, metonymy, synecdoche, and hyperbole, if any, in which the statements are clothed, and the immediate or wider context and setting in which these statements are found will have to say: This and this alone is what Scripture is stating here. He will have to say this even though he may not accept what Scripture is saying.

In Genesis 1 to 3 Scripture speaks historically, and it must be understood as speaking of literal, historical facts. In Revelation 20, Scripture speaks symbolically. In John 15, Jesus speaks metaphorically of Himself as the true vine and of His believers as His branches. In Acts 15, Paul speaks metonymically of Moses being read and preached in the synagogues every Sabbath day. Moses here means the Pentateuch given by God through Moses as His inspired writer. In Mark 1:5 the evangelist states hyperbolically “that all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem went out to John and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.” All is here not meant in the absolute sense. This is hyperbole; as the context indicates. In each case Scripture must be interpreted on its own terms to get at its one proper sense, revealing its intended divine message. When Scripture is pleased to use a round number, rather than a precise number, it is not less clear and factual. The message that human language commonly conveys through a round number is then also the message that Scripture wants to convey with its own use of a round number. When Scripture uses phenomenal language, language which speaks of things as they appear to our senses, the clear message to be apprehended will be the truth which is commonly conveyed through such phenomenal language. It is in this sense that the Book of Joshua speaks of the sun standing “still upon Gibeon,” and the moon, “in the valley of Ajalon.” It is in this sense that the Scripture frequently speaks of the rising of the sun. All this is included when we say that every statement of Scripture must be understood in its native sense according to vocabulary, grammar, context, and the linguistic usage of a specific era or of all times.

Scripture clearly presents the truths that we need for our Christian faith and life, the truths of creation, also, of man’s creation in God’s image, the truths of the fall and of original sin, of our total depravity by nature, of our separation from God, of our inability to make restitution or to contribute anything to it, the truth of God’s free and unmerited saving love, of His justification of the whole world through the atoning sacrifice of His incarnate Son, of the personal justification of the sinner through faith, of faith as the gift of God, of the new life of the Christian and of its holy fruits as the creation of the Holy Spirit.

In considering the message of the church we will constantly remember that none of these truths or any other point of Christian faith and life can be certain and remain certain for us, unless we hold firmly to the outward clarity of the Scriptures, to this that the message of Scripture lies in the message contained in the very words of Scripture in their full linguistic usage and in their closer and wider contextual setting.

When we cling to the outward, objective clarity of Scripture, we know that we are dealing with certainties: When in our worker training program, when at our Seminary, we cling to the outward, objective clarity of Scripture, we know that we will be sending out servants of the Word who will have certainties to present. How unenviable in contrast is the plight of seminaries that have lost sight of the clarity of Scripture in the sense of God’s authoritative presentation of the truth of Christian faith and life in human language. Those who follow the historical-critical approach to Scripture, and see in the statements of Scripture merely the religious insights of the writers, are never sure how much they will have to be updated and adjusted to make them valid and relevant for modern man.

Take Romans 22b-24: “For there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Because of the outward, or external, clarity of the Scripture, even the unbeliever who reads these statements, carefully marking the meaning of every word as St. Paul uses it and observing likewise the whole context; will have to say, though he refuses to accept these truths and bow under their verdict: Here Scripture teaches that all men are of themselves under condemnation before God and that justification in His sight is a pure gift of God’s grace for Jesus’ sake. Referring to the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper, Luther maintained: “For even if I were a Turk; a Jew, or a heathen who thought nothing of the Christian faith, and yet heard or read this scriptural account of the Sacrament, I would still have to say: ‘I do not believe the Christian doctrine, of course, but this I must admit: if

they wish to be Christians and maintain their doctrine, they must believe that Christ's body and blood are physically eaten and drunk in the bread and wine.”

So throughout, Scripture clearly expresses the truths which God wishes to convey and teach. More often than not the unbeliever, and frequently even the believer, insofar as he unwittingly still clings to error, lets his own prejudices and misconceptions hinder him in ascertaining even the outward meaning of Scripture. Such failure to understand is, of course, due to the sinful depravity of man's inborn nature. It is not due to Scripture's lack of external clarity.

Yet the clarity which the Holy Scripture asserts for itself goes deeper than this outward, this external, clarity, vital and basic as the outward clarity always will remain. The clarity of Scripture is above all a spiritual one and consists in this, that Scripture possesses the power to win acceptance for the truths of faith and life, of law and gospel, which it clearly teaches. It has the divine power to effect a change in us, to effect in us a spiritual understanding and comprehension of these truths, a blessed comprehension of faith.

Paul tells Timothy: “And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:15). Scripture and Scripture make us wise unto salvation and it makes us wise through faith in Christ Jesus. There is only one way of salvation for sinful man and that is through the free gift of God's grace, through the gift of the perfect righteousness which His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, has won for us with His holy life and His innocent suffering and death. Salvation is through this gift appropriated by us sinners in faith. The one great message of Scripture is the message of this gift of salvation through Christ Jesus. All that the Scriptures tell us serves the purpose of imparting this gift of salvation to us through faith and of making us blessed, rich, and fruitful in its possession for time and eternity.

St. Paul tells us that all Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for reproof. Natural man, though he may outwardly understand Scripture's message of sin and grace, of himself rejects it. Vainly he wants to work out his own salvation. Vainly he insists on recognition of his own merits, yet Scripture is equal to the situation. Scripture has power to reprove natural man, to convict him of his utter guilt and condemnation before God. Scripture manifests this power through its message of the law: “By the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rm 3:20).

Yet even when the sinner is thus reprovved and convicted of his sin and condemnation he still is at enmity with God. Of himself he has no power to trust in Jesus and His grace. Yet Scripture is profitable for correction. Through its gospel message it awakens faith in the sinner's heart and in such faith comforts him with the assurance of forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Finally, Scripture is profitable for instruction, for training. It constantly nourishes, strengthens, preserves the believer in faith, fills his heart with thankful love, helps him to fight against all that is sinful, constrains and guides him in striving ever anew and ever more fully after all that is pleasing in God's sight.

Scripture and Scripture alone has such power to reprove, to correct, to instruct, such power to produce and sustain spiritual life. It has it because it is inspired, God-breathed from beginning to end, because it is the Word of God. Jesus said: “The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life” (Jn 6:63). That is the spiritual clarity of Holy Scripture. When you read the Scriptures, when you hear the Scriptures, it is the same as though God Himself were standing before you in person in all His holy majesty and were addressing only to you the words of His love. The Scriptures are not merely a record of a past revelation of God, they are also and above all His ever present and powerful revelation. The gospel of Christ is ever replete with the power of the Holy Spirit. It is well that we never lose sight of this spiritual clarity of the Holy Scriptures with reference to the message of the church. Mindful of the spiritual clarity of the Holy Scriptures, public servants of the Word need not anxiously endeavor to prove the truths of Scripture, or attempt to demonstrate their reasonableness or vindicate their relevancy for modern man. They will confidently content themselves with clearly and joyfully presenting the precious saving truths of Scripture, and let God's Word at its own time manifest its blessed power.

Points to Note as We Uphold the Clarity of Scripture

1. That Scripture is clear does not mean, first of all, that it satisfies our curiosity in all that we may be inclined to ask.

Almost any scriptural account may leave a host of questions unanswered. This is certainly true when you think of the creation account. Many things that we would like to know-about the origin and beginning of all things are not related to us. This is true even of questions which, in themselves could be the object of our legitimate interest. We must learn to be content that it is that way. We will learn to be content with this if we always keep in mind that God gave us His Word to make us wise unto salvation and not to satisfy our curiosity. He alone knows what was necessary and beneficial for the former purpose. Studying a larger-or-smaller portion of Scripture means carefully noting just what is said in so many words, what is clearly intimated and suggested, and what is stated elsewhere in Scripture on this matter. When this has been ascertained, our attention ought to be taken away from everything which Scripture has left unanswered and be directed wholly on what is actually set forth.

Biblical interpretation all too frequently succumbs to the temptation of theorizing endlessly about questions which Scripture has left unanswered and then treating much too lightly what is clearly set forth. Seminarians readily fall into this temptation in their first efforts at biblical exposition. Yet this temptation is by no means confined to seminarians. If this procedure is not corrected by precept and good example in our worker training, it may characterize the later sermon and catechetical work of our workers. It may hinder pastors as good stewards in apportioning what God has principally put at their disposal for distribution.

Let me cite an example. In expounding the account of Abraham's call a great deal of time and attention is often devoted to such matters as to whether Abraham, too, had been an idolater before his call, what that idolatry might have been like at Ur, or whether through his call saving faith was for the first time awakened in his heart, or whether such faith was merely strengthened and confirmed. All these are questions which Scripture does not answer definitely. What as a result is not adequately unfolded, when too much attention is devoted to these unanswered questions, is the wonderful complex of promises to Abraham, in which every individual promise gets meaning and purpose through the final Messianic promise that in him all the families of the earth, would be blessed. These revealed certainties need our full attention. This unit of promises is the program according to which God's entire Old Testament plan of salvation is unfolded.

It is generally more beneficial to dwell on the obvious than to elucidate the obscure. Our appreciation of the clarity of Scripture demands that in presenting the message of the church we direct all attention on unfolding what Scripture clearly teaches. Matters which Scripture does not clearly answer or even touch upon we will, on the other hand, readily put aside in the confidence that these are matters which God has not deemed vital for our salvation..

2. That Scripture is clear; does not mean that it makes every truth which it reveals for our salvation fully comprehensible for us.

A great many truths which Scripture reveals as the blessed object of our faith, and which make God's gift of pardon and salvation certain for us, nevertheless embrace aspects which far transcend our comprehension.

God has revealed Himself in Scripture as a Triune God, one in essence yet three distinct Persons, equal in divine majesty, power, and glory. Through this revelation we rejoice in faith over all that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost have done and still do for our salvation. Yet we are quite unable to grasp the mystery of the Holy Trinity.

To assure us that in Jesus Christ we have an all-sufficient Savior, Scripture clearly teaches that God's eternal Son became incarnate by the virgin Mary and effectively fulfilled the law in sinners' stead and bore all

the curses of sin for us; humbling Himself even to the death of the cross. We are quite unable; however, to comprehend how He can be true God and true man in one wonderful Person.

Scripture clearly reveals how Christ instituted a holy supper for His believers in which under bread and wine He offers us His very body and blood, given and shed for us, as a seal of our pardon and salvation. Still, we cannot grasp the real presence of Christ's body and blood, its oral manducation by all communicants, or the sacramental union of this body and blood with the earthly elements. This is not necessary for us to enjoy the benefits of this blessed Means of Grace.

Scripture clearly comforts us who believe in Christ our Savior that our faith is not something incidental but the result of the blessed fact that already from all eternity God for Christ's sake has set His heart upon us individually, so that our faith and salvation and all that pertains to it flows out of this election of grace which cannot fail. We lose this comfort only when we try to delve into questions concerning our election which lie beyond our comprehension and which Scripture does not solve for our reason.

Also with respect to all these truths the outward clarity of Scripture restricts itself to this that Scripture clearly sets forth the truths themselves to the extent that God has deemed a knowledge of them vital for our comfort and salvation. In its spiritual clarity Scripture leads us to embrace these truths in faith though they may in many respects transcend our comprehension.

It is important that we understand the clarity of Scripture in this way. This includes distinguishing between naming something and explaining it. In presenting the truths of Christian faith and life which are clearly taught in Scripture, especially those involving aspects which transcend our human comprehension, the church has coined many special names and terms. Concerning the doctrine of Christ's person, for example, we speak of the *hypostatic* or personal union of Christ's human and divine nature, of the communication of the two natures and of their attributes, of Christ's humiliation and of His exaltation. The *Formula of Concord* among our Lutheran confessional writings particularly, uses many names and terms of this kind in its precise delineation of scriptural truths. This is often misunderstood and decried as a piece of Lutheran scholasticism. This criticism fails to understand the real purpose of the technical theological terms used at times by the *Formula of Concord*, fails to understand also the careful theological distinctions which it makes. It is, of course, a common fallacy to think that naming something explains it. The *Formula of Concord*, however, is not guilty of this fallacy. With its doctrinal terms it is not seeking to explain or prove any of the mysteries of faith. These terms get their meaning and content from the clear statements of Holy Scripture and serve the sole purpose of helping us hold on to the truths of Scripture and to refer to them readily. Also the fine doctrinal distinctions made by the *Formula of Concord* all serve the sole purpose of noting just what scripture does and does not say concerning the cardinal truths of our faith, whether we can grasp the individual feature with our understanding or not.

In this connection it is equally vital that we distinguish carefully between the ministerial and magisterial use of human reason. In the study of Scripture our reason is to serve as an instrument of apprehension: "That is its ministerial use; its use as a servant. Since God has revealed all the truths of Christian faith and life that we need for our salvation through the medium of human language, we are to use our reason to determine according to all the rules and devices of language and composition just what it is that Scripture tells us. In all this Scripture functions as a servant. When that has been ascertained, our reason has done its work. It is not to do more and assume also the function of a teacher and judge and presume to decide whether what Scripture states can be permitted to stand or whether it must be modified in some way to make it more reasonable and more acceptable to current human teaching. By such a magisterial use of human reason every truth of Holy Scripture has been corrupted in the course of the history of the church. Luther himself employed, the ministerial use of reason most conscientiously in his study of Scripture but inveigled heavily against any magisterial use.

3. That Scripture is clear does not mean that every statement or portion is subjectively clear to every hearer and reader.

Scripture asserts an objective, not a subjective, clarity. That it be clear also to us individually calls for careful, patient study, some parts more, others less. We need to let Scripture explain Scripture, to compare

Scripture with Scripture considering all the texts in which Scripture teaches any certain truth: We need to study every statement carefully in its closer or wider context to gain full understanding. Scripture is not .a collection of disconnected definitions for our faith and life. Yet it does abound with many passages which sum up vital truths in a vary precise manner. These convey their full meaning even without consideration of the specific context in which they are found. Of this John 3:16 is a fine example.

In spite of the objective clarity of Scripture, parts of Scriptures may for various reasons remain obscure even after much diligent study. There are passages which, though clear in themselves and perfectly intelligible to those to whom they were first addressed, are difficult for us in one point or another because we no longer possess the exact meaning of this or that term used in the original language. It is impossible for us, for example, to identify with certainty all the precious stones which were found in the Old Testament high priest's breastplate. In the creation account Moses refers to the branches of the river of Paradise with names that expressed some type of relation to rivers which were familiar to his first hearers and readers, the people of Israel. Only two of those rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, are familiar to us. We can identify them because they are referred to elsewhere in Scripture under the same names. This is not true of the names of the other two branches of the river of Paradise, the Gihon and the Pison. We cannot identify them because they are not referred to elsewhere in Scripture.

All this does not in any way impugn the clarity of Scripture as the absolute authority in matters of faith and life. For though we will consider every statement contained in Holy Scripture as inspired and factually true and as a precious part of the Scriptures given for our salvation, not every statement in and by itself establishes a truth or is an article of faith. Take the statement that each of the twelve stones of the high priest's breastplate were inscribed with one of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel and that each was a very specific precious stone. All this does not establish but only illustrates and symbolizes the truth, that each of these tribes was a precious part of God's chosen people, in whose name the high priest was to function. The same is true of many historical statements of Scripture. Though they contain elements that illustrate, exemplify, and elucidate certain truths of faith and life, and for this reason are all written for our learning and worthy of our earnest study, they do not M themselves constitute an article of Christian faith and life.

Scripture does not cease to be a clear authority for our faith and life even though this or that statement which actually teaches an article of faith should for one reason or another remain unclear for us individually. For the truths of Christian faith and life are for the most part taught again and again in a great abundance of Scripture texts. In addition they are clearly illustrated by a wealth of examples. These vital truths are also taught in such simple, lucid statements that even a child can comprehend them, as the Scripture proof passages in our Catechism show.

In the accounts of Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments, we do meet with some statements of historical details which, though clear enough in what they assert, nevertheless present a difficulty as we compare them with other scriptural statements with which they do not seem to agree. We refer to such statements as Bible difficulties. In our faith-wrought confidence in Scripture we will simply let every clear statement of Scripture stand; we will add, never subtract. We will let that which is clearly stated in both statements stand, even though we may not be able to harmonize them. A lack of sufficient details may make this difficult or impossible. Scripture tells us, for example; of the two sons of the patriarch Isaac, Esau and Jacob. Yet these two sons of Isaac are also referred to in Scripture by two altogether different names, Edom and Israel. This does not present a difficulty, since Genesis gives us the life history of these two men in sufficient detail that we know just how each came to bear a double set of significant names. When we compare the names and the fathers of the three wives of Esau, however, as they are listed in Genesis 36 with the names and the fathers of his three wives as they are listed in Genesis 26:34 and 28:9 and find a disparity of names, we face a Bible difficulty. The matter may be just as simple as in the other instance, only here we lack sufficient details to know why these individuals bore different names. Thus we are not able to effect a harmonization.

Luther offers three fine thoughts to guide us in handling such Bible difficulties in his comments on Genesis 11:10. There we are told that Shem was 100 years old and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood. Here it is :asked: How can this be? Not only are we told that Noah begat Shem in his 500th year and that the

flood began in Noah's 600th year; but in addition Arphaxad is listed as the third son of Shem born after the flood. Luther first of all comments: "Our faith is not imperiled if we do not know these things." Then he immediately adds: "For this is certain that Scripture does not lie." His final suggestion is: "But what can be adduced to vindicate the authority of Scripture is useful, even though it may not be altogether certain." Also for the difficulties in Genesis 11:10 Luther is not at a loss in offering suggestions for harmonization. He points out that two years after the flood means two years after the beginning of the flood. He supports this by pointing to another statement which makes this explanation evident. He also offers the suggestion of multiple births. In that same calm and undisturbed spirit we, too, shall want to offer our suggested harmonizations of Bible difficulties, confident that Scripture does not lie and that our faith is not imperiled if we cannot solve such difficulties for want of the required details which God did not deem necessary to supply. We will also be undismayed if our offered harmonizations should not always be the ultimate solution. The clarity of Scripture is not impaired by such things.

But does not Scripture itself admit a measure of unclarity when in 2 Peter 3:16 it says of Paul's epistles, "In which are some things hard to understand which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest as they do also. the other Scriptures unto their own destruction"? If we carefully note this passage we will see that criticism is here not raised against Paul's epistle or against Scripture, but against their abuse by the unlearned and unstable. There are indeed profound truths touched upon in Holy Scripture. This includes truths that still lie beyond our human experience. Of the latter nature are the matters specifically under discussion in this passage of 2 Peter, matters which deal with the last things, those things that will come to pass on judgment day and thereafter. When Scripture does speak of such things, we have all the more reason to note with the greatest of care just what Scripture does say and does not say, so that we do not fall into the pitfalls of the unlearned and unstable, of wresting Scripture, of doing violence to it.

The warning against wresting Scripture, that is, of forcing it to say what we want it to say, is still very much in place. All too many cling tenaciously to their own human thoughts and judgments as they read Scripture, instead of listening humbly to what God clearly tells them. Strong human prejudices blind many against the messages of Scripture in spite of the clarity in which they are set forth. The Jews who read the entire Old Testament from their legalistic and work righteousness approach wholly missed its gospel message. For the Reformed, who approach Scripture with the axioms that the finite cannot comprehend the infinite and that God does not bid us to believe anything that we cannot comprehend with our reason; the special comfort of the Lord's Supper remained hidden. Because of antinaturalistic and evolutionistic presuppositions endless Bible scholars have been drawn into the hopeless quagmire of Old Testament source criticism, into JEDP source theories and multiple variations of them.

It is indeed true that we have differences in interpretation of individual scriptural passages even among orthodox teachers who extend to each other the hand of Christian fellowship. But to allow a difference in exegesis is not tantamount to admitting that Scripture texts are unclear. If the varying interpretations exclude one another, only one can be the correct one. For, every Scripture statement has only one proper intended sense. If, therefore, a difference of interpretation exists, we have every reason to ascertain what that one intended sense really is. An interpretation for which no reasonable basis in the text and context can be supplied has no place in the Christian church.

If someone establishes a truth on the basis of a faulty interpretation of a specific biblical statement but this truth itself is clearly taught in other clear passages of Scripture, such an unwarranted interpretation does not in itself become a matter which is divisive of church fellowship. This will be borne as long as the individual who propounds it does not in principle want to say something else than what Scripture says. Likewise, if a fellow Christian still fails to see a truth of faith or life in a Scripture passage in which it is clearly set forth, but holds to that truth on the basis of other Bible passages, his weakness as an interpreter in a given instance need not become a divisive matter.

4. It is vital that we do not confuse the spiritual clarity of Scripture with its outward clarity.

Some in our day say Scripture becomes God's Word when it convinces me, awakens a response in me. No, Scripture is God's clear Word of itself as it comes to us, but it becomes spiritually clear to us, and we experience it as God's saving Word, when it humbles us with its message of the law and wins our hearts in faith with its gospel message of pardon, life, and salvation.

The outward and the spiritual clarity of Scripture are not understood and distinguished properly by those who confuse enlightenment with inspiration. The writer of the 119th Psalm did not confuse the two. In the 105th verse he confesses, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." He designates the Scripture of which he is speaking as God's Word. He thereby acknowledges that Scripture is God's Word of itself; he likewise acknowledges the truth of inspiration. In addition he confesses that this divine Word is a light and a lamp, thus paying tribute to the outward objective clarity of that inspired Word. At the same time he prays in the 18th verse: "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law." That is a prayer for enlightenment, a prayer that God would overcome all the human weaknesses by which some of the wondrous things clearly stated in God's Word might remain hidden. We, too, as often as we approach the study of God's Word will want to ask for the Holy Spirit's enlightenment. But this is not a prayer by which we ask God to make His Word clear in itself. It is a prayer that God make His clear Word both outwardly and spiritually clear to us; to do that not apart and aside from His Word but through that divine Word itself. Such prayers ought to be the daily accompaniment as we hear and read God's Word, the Holy Scriptures; the message of Christ's church.

The Application of the Clarity of Scripture to the Creation Account

How will we want to handle and treat the creation account, or the first three chapters of Genesis, in the light of the clarity of Scripture? Yes, how must we treat it in the light of all that we have stated concerning the clarity of Scripture? We will restrict ourselves to the consideration of only two questions:

- a) Does Scripture permit us to see anything else than a historical cal account in the first three chapters of Genesis, which includes the account of creation?
- b) Does Genesis 1 at all leave the nature of the creation days an uncertain matter?

We shall try to answer the first question principally from the wider context of Genesis 1-3, the structure of the Book Genesis. Any discerning reader of the Book of Genesis will become aware of one of the first points made in this essay, namely the point that Scripture is basically the account of God's saving activity in behalf of fallen mankind. Genesis, the very first portion of the Penteteuch, of the five Books of Moses, and of the entire Scripture, relates how God, almost from the beginning, ever since man fell into sin, in his free and faithful grace became active in behalf of the salvation of mankind.

Up to Genesis 11:26 we are told how God directed His saving activity upon the whole human race as it existed, first of all, in the descendants of Adam, and after the flood, in the descendants of Noah's three sons. In the last thirty-nine chapters of Genesis we are told how God, in a new program of this same free and faithful saving love, carefully trained the patriarchs; Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through three generations. This training was His first step in building up His special people of Israel, through whom He purposed to carry through rough His plan of salvation until, in the fullness of time, He would bring forth the divine Redeemer for all mankind from their midst.

Anyone carefully studying Genesis will immediately become aware of the ten *toledoths*, in which the entire material from 2:4 to the end of the closing fiftieth chapter is divided. Each *toledoth* is a history, which sets forth how the thing or the person by which it is designated developed, or what developed from it or him. In each case development took place while God was active in behalf of the salvation of mankind. Five of these *toledoths*, or histories, depict God's saving activity as it was directed upon the whole original word, five as it was directed upon the patriarchs.

The last five *toledoths*, those of Terah, Ishmael, Isaac, Esau, and of Jacob, can leave no doubt that they are meant by the inspired writer, Moses, as historical accounts. The *toledoth* of Terah shows how God in the interest of His plan of salvation chose Abram of the household of Terah and trained him to trust wholly in the

great complex of promises given to him. These promises all found their purpose and meaning in the final assurance that through Abram all the families of the earth should be blessed. This *toledoth* of Terah lets us hear how God finally gave Abraham the son of promise in Isaac, and how Isaac was clearly established as Abraham's heir. All this is treated again and again in Scripture as historical.

Since Ishmael, the, other son of Abraham, formed a side line, his *toledoth*, his history, is very brief, though of sufficient length to show that even the one divine promise given to this son of Abraham, that twelve princes should descend from him, went into fulfillment.

The *toledoth* of Isaac tells us that the second patriarch, in whom faith under God's training manifested itself in triumphant submission under many trials, had two sons. Even before their birth the Lord had made it known that they would both develop into nations, but that the elder, Esau, should serve the younger, Jacob. Jacob, the chosen one, was prone to trust in his own ingenuity and to take recourse in faithless schemes of deceit and cunning. Yet by adverse experiences on the one hand and by His unmerited grace and protection on the other, God trained and purged Jacob until he learned to cast himself humbly upon God's grace and thus became an Israel, a patriarch who in such humble faith had power with God and man. All this again is treated throughout Scripture as historical.

The *toledoth* of Esau relates how this son of Isaac, though again forming a side line, also developed into a nation, Edom, even as God's Word had predicted before his birth. Deuteronomy, Obadiah, Malachi especially confirm this *toledoth* as history.

The final *toledoth* of Genesis, that of Jacob, shows how this patriarch in his twelve sons developed into a family of seventy souls, who together with their households were brought to Egypt. Here they were to grow and develop into that chosen nation which Exodus thrusts before us as the express abject of God's Old Testament kingdom activity.

Now what do we find when we go back to the first five *toledoths*? The last four of these five *toledoths* impress themselves upon the unprejudiced reader in equal measure as historical accounts. The second, the *toledoth* of Adam, sets forth the progenitors of the Savior from Adam through Seth to Noah. All the individuals listed are clearly incorporated as such actual progenitors in the New Testament genealogy of Christ given in the gospel of Luke. Scripture wants us to regard them as historical. This *toledoth* at the same time tells us that even the descendants of Seth, among whom and through whom God had established the public proclamation of His Savior's name, gradually despised their heritage and defected likewise. They joined the descendants of Cain who already at an earlier time were estranged from God and given to a life of self-glorification, arrogant pride, violence, and worldliness.

The third, the *toledoth* of Noah, relates how through this Sethite, who among his contemporaries had by God's grace remained believing and devout; God preserved the eight souls of his family in an ark while He carried out a judgment of universal destruction through the flood waters. All this is a part of God's saving activity in behalf of mankind, assuring the ultimate fulfillment of the Protevangelion. All of God's judgments, while they are indeed a manifestation of His holy wrath upon sin and obdurate unbelief, nevertheless stand in the service of His saving grace, and are at the same time always a deliverance of His own, His believers. This will be the also of the final judgment.

Does Scripture want us to take the account of Noah and of the flood to be historical? The answer of none less than the Savior Himself, in the gospels is clear: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (Lk 17:26-27). Peter in his second epistle (3:5-6) warns all who scoff that there have been and will be no changes in the universe: "This they willingly forget, that there were heavens from of old; and an earth compacted out of the water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished; but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (ASV).

The fourth, the *toledoth* of the sons of Noah, shows how the human race also as it developed anew from Noah's three sons, by and large again pushed God's, gospel promise aside, sought self-glorification instead of

the glorification of God's Savior name, sought to work out its own welfare and salvation rather than to cling to God's gift of salvation in humble faith. This is clearly illustrated by the episode of the Tower of Babel.

How then can the first *toledoth*, that of heaven and earth, Genesis 2:4-4:26, covering the accounts of paradise, the fall, and Cain and Abel be anything but historical? How could this very first *toledoth*, without itself presenting history, be lined up in this carefully built-up structure of Genesis, with all the other nine *toledoths*, which are closely connected historical accounts? A *toledoth* offering symbolical stories, parables setting forth universal truths would be a glaring incongruity. Yet as a mere collection of symbolical stories and parables the *toledoth* of heaven and earth would not merely be an unexplained incongruity. What is even more decisive, it would leave a most serious vacuum. It would rob the historical course of God's saving activity as depicted in the other nine *toledoths* of Genesis of its starting point. It would remove the factual, historical situation to which God responded in carrying through His saving activity in behalf of mankind. Without the historical happening of the fall and without the setting in which it took place, the other nine *toledoths* become quite unintelligible. No, the whole structure of Genesis leaves us no alternative with respect to the *toledoth* of heaven and earth. It must be taken as an account of historical happenings. The New Testament, of course, confirms this.

That which precedes the account of the fall in Genesis supplies indispensable information concerning the historical situation and the historical happenings antedating the fall. This is true, first of all, of the creation account of Genesis 1:1-2:3. This portion of Genesis precedes all of the ten *toledoths*. It is the necessary introduction for all of them. In the context of all that follows, the creation account constituting this introduction must also of necessity be taken as actual history. Whatever this creation account therefore clearly asserts concerning the origin of all things can only be understood as a presentation of what actually happened in the way that it is said to have happened.

At the same time a discerning analysis of the Genesis creation account in its context makes it very evident that it was not given to us primarily to satisfy our curiosity about every detail of the origin of all things. Hence we are not surprised that it leaves endless questions unanswered. It serves primarily as an introduction to the primordial history of God's saving activity, of His reign of saving grace. It emphasizes those facts which form a most vital and indispensable background for the understanding of this saving activity of our God. We can briefly sum up these emphases in this way: The creation account of Genesis 1:1-2 was an introduction to the message of Genesis emphasizes that the eternal, almighty, all-wise God created all things in perfection during six days for the benefit of man, whom He created in His own image to be the special object of His love and whom He drew into His own Sabbath rest of joy and satisfaction over His works. Man had blessed fellowship with His divine Creator and rejoiced in Him and in all His works.

The remaining verses of chapter two of Genesis as a part of the first *toledoth*, namely that of heaven and earth, serve to give us further valuable background for the cataclysmic development of the fall, so that we may evaluate it aright. We are given a more detailed picture of the Creator's intimate relation to man, His foremost creature. It lets us see how God revealed Himself as the Lord, the God of free and faithful love, (the Tetragrammaton), who lavished His love upon man and in every way showed Himself intent upon making man blessed and happy. God formed man carefully. He fit out Paradise for man as a wonderful first home on this earth to meet all of his needs and to satisfy all of his capacities. He gave man satisfying activity in caring for the garden. In the tree of the knowledge of good and evil He provided man with a simple, yet effective opportunity to express his thankful devotion and obedience and thus to progress from concreated innocence to conscious holiness. With the institution of marriage God supplied man with earthly happiness through a fitting help and companion.

Since the order that God established in the relation of man and woman was disregarded in the fall, the account of the institution of marriage offers additional background for the fall.

As portrayed in Genesis 2, man himself appears as a holy and sinless creature, who clearly bore God's image. All of his thought processes were in perfect harmony with God's blessed thoughts: With his feelings and emotions man evaluated everything in full harmony with the perfect judgment of God's heart. All of man's impulses were exercised in harmony with the holy will of his God; all of man's conscious desires were directed

toward that which was pleasing in God's sight. Man possessed this sinlessness, the image of God, in the bond of a perfect trust toward God, with which he was created. Destroy this trust, this faith; and everything would be awry for man. All the blessings of God's love and fellowship would come to an end for him. This is what the tempter reckoned with. This is what happened in the fall. The extraordinary development which heaven and earth experienced was this that man, the very crown of God's creation, was drawn into sin and not only brought death and damnation upon himself but gave occasion also for the entire animate and inanimate creature world to be made subject to vanity and to be placed under the bondage of corruption: (Rm 8:20-22.). It was to this dire development that God in His free and faithful grace responded with His primordial saving activity as set forth in the Book of Genesis. This is the saving activity which the Lord carried out throughout the Old Testament and which is fully unfolded in the New Testament in the atoning death and in the glorious resurrection and exaltation of Christ our Lord. Question Genesis 1-3 as historical account, and the entire message of Scripture hangs in the air, lacks its proper foundation. The clarity of the Genesis account, as well as the clarity of the rest of Scripture does not allow this.

Now to the other question: Does Genesis 1 at all leave the nature of the creation days an uncertain matter?

If, like Luther, we really take the outward clarity of Holy Scriptures seriously, we will have to answer: No. Acknowledging the clarity of Scripture means acknowledging that what Scripture is saying must be determined from the use of words in their context. The meaning of terms must be determined by noting the usage of such terms in their wider and narrower context in all the instances in which they occur.

The term day; *yom*, in the original Hebrew, occurs in three different senses in the creation account, very similar to the three usages with which we are accustomed in other languages:

1. *yom* is used to express time in a very general way; as when we say: In our day travel was much more difficult.
2. It denotes the light period of a normal day, as when we say: I have given up my night job and now work during the day.
3. It denotes a normal day approximating 24 hours, as when we say: A year has 365 days.

The first usage, expressing time in a general way, is found Genesis 2:4 in the statement: "In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens....Here *yom* could be translated time: "At the time that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens..." Also this usage of *yom* as a general designation of time is something quite different from a longer period or eon with definite limits.

The second usage; denoting the light period of a normal day, what, we call daytime; is found in the fourth and fifth verses of the first chapter. There we are told that "God divided the light from the darkness, and God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." Notice that here, where Moses develops this narrow concept of day and the concept of night, both are introduced without articles. The next time he uses these carefully developed and introduced concepts of day and night, in verses 14 and 16; they occur with articles as known quantities. We read verse 14: "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night. Again we read in verse 16: "God made great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night." What the creation account wants to tell us is that the light period and the darkness period, of which we heard in detail in verses 4 and 5, that God instituted them when He divided them and solemnly called them day and night respectively, are the same light and darkness periods which are permanently regulated by the two larger heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon. Whoever does not take note of this is disregarding the careful manner in which the creation account defines terms. This would leave the careful explanations of verses 4 and 5 without any purpose. Let us keep these facts in mind as we now go onto the third usage of *yom*, "day," involved in the six creation days.

After we have been told in the creation account that God ordained, instituted, and solemnly named the daytime and nighttime periods, we read at the end of verse 5, in a literal rendering of the Hebrew: “And evening set in and morning set in, one day.” Here we have the third usage of “day,” *yom*, whereby the first creation day is clearly defined. It comprised a light period, called day in the narrow sense, as well as a darkness period, called night. We noted that these periods were carefully defined. Here we are told that the first light period came to an end when evening set in, and that the first darkness period came to an end when morning set in. Together they formed the first creation day. It cannot be anything else but what we commonly call an ordinary day, approximately 24 hours. Each subsequent creation day is defined in identical terms; in each case we have the phrase: evening set in and morning set in; and then, the second day, the third day, the fourth day, the fifth day, the sixth day. The Hebrew terms, for evening and morning, each occurring more than a hundred times in the Old Testament, never are used to mean anything but that which brings daytime and nighttime of an ordinary day to an end. Note also that each creation day, after the first creation day was carefully defined, is modified by a numerical adjective, an ordinal number, namely, first day, second day, etc. Yet whenever a qualifying cardinal or ordinal number is attached to “day” in the Old Testament (and there are over 200 such instances), the meaning is always that of an ordinary day, never anything else.

The permanent arrangement for such normal days, approximating 24 hours, is then related in the account of the fourth day of creation. We are told that God made the heavenly bodies that they might be “for signs and for seasons, and for days, and for years.” It is obvious that these “days” must be something less than the “years;” also different from the “seasons,” and cannot be eons.

It is quite commonly conceded that the creation days after the fourth day are meant by the writer of Genesis to be understood as normal days approximating 24 hours. Yet, then all of them must be such normal days. Because they are enumerated by a series ordinal numbers (second, third, fourth, fifth, etc.) Only like things can be enumerated in this way.

For anyone to whom Scripture is the inspired Word of God, Exodus 20:11 should be additional conclusive evidence that this is the manner in which the creation days are meant to be understood. For the import of the Sabbath commandment was not this, that after six periods of shorter or longer duration Israel was to rest from all labor for one period of shorter or longer duration, that is, that after six hours, weeks, months, years, Israel was to rest one hour, one week, one month, or one decade. No, the Sabbath law specified that after six ordinary work days Israel was to rest one ordinary day. Yet this could not be established from Exodus 20:8-11 if in close context the same designation, *yom*, day, in reference to God’s creation labors and His subsequent resting, is without any indication to mean something different from ordinary days. This is the insidious thing about an interpretation in which a word is given a meaning for which there is no support in the immediate or wider context. It makes the whole message of the text uncertain; for it disregards the truth of the outward clarity of Scripture, on which all scriptural exposition rests and without which it is impossible to say, “Thus saith the Lord.”

But someone may say just with reference to Exodus 20:11: Is not the first creation day different from the others, though the others are lined up with it through ordinal numbers? The other creation days began with the beginning of a light period as morning set in and lasted to the next morning. Yet Exodus 20:11 says: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.” Yet did not the creation of heaven and earth take place “in the beginning” before God with the creation of light had brought the first daytime period into existence? Thus the first day, according to the reckoning of Exodus, must have included “the beginning,” of whatever duration it may have been. We are quite ready to grant this. Yet this does not affect the argument that only like things are enumerated with ordinals. For when items are otherwise essentially alike, even such items which have an additional exceptional feature can be counted along with the others, providing the exceptional feature has been specially mentioned. This applies also to the first day of creation. In essence it is defined in Genesis 1:5 as consisting of the combination of daytime and nighttime. In Exodus 20:11 it is specially stated that this first day also includes the beginning in which God called heaven and earth, the universe in its initial state, into existence. But because that special feature was already called to our attention in

Genesis 1:1, it does not hinder us from lining up all the other creation days, defined in essence in one and the same manner, with it.

Concerning the seventh day, it is not expressly said: Evening set in, and morning set in, the seventh day. This does not warrant the conclusion, however, that it did not obtain for this day. That Moses does not state it may have been due to an altogether different reason. (The most natural explanation for the fact that Moses does not solemnly close the seventh day as he does each of the creation days would seem to be this: What happened on each individual creation day was unique; it belonged to that one day alone and would not be repeated on any subsequent day. That is why Moses closes each creation day in a very solemn manner. The joy in God's works and in the blessed fellowship with Him, the gracious Creator of all things, which He offered to man on the seventh day with His own resting was, however, not to be restricted to the seventh day, but was to characterize every subsequent day likewise. Thus there was no reason for solemnly closing the seventh day. Through the fall this changed, of course, but our gracious God immediately offered this lost rest to man anew in the gospel (Protevangel). That is in line with the exposition of the fourth chapter of Hebrews.)

Nothing certain can be deduced from silence at any time. It is not exegetically correct to begin with the first and the seventh day, which have special features, and from them to conclude something concerning the other five days. The proper exegetical procedure is rather that of beginning with the definition which is given for all the six creation days: "And evening set in, and morning set in, the second day, the third day..." Then it is to be observed that this is also said of the first day, concerning which a special feature obtains, and that the seventh day; of which it is not said, even as the first day are both lined up with all the rest through ordinal numbers. On the basis of these considerations it is again established that according to linguistic usage and context the creation days are to be understood as ordinary days.

Hence even a liberal Old Testament scholar like John Skinner, who does not accept the creation account himself, states in *The International Critical Commentary on Genesis*: "The interpretation of *yom* as aeon, a favorite recourse of harmonists of science and revelation, is opposed to the plain sense of the passage, and has no warrant in the Hebrew usage (not even Psalm 90:4)."

The clarity of Scripture is at stake. We will want to ask those who wish the nature of the creation days to remain an open question to furnish support for any other understanding of these days than that which is clearly set forth by Scripture. In the message of Christ's church we will want to include in the doctrine of creation also what is clearly stated concerning the creation days. We have all the more reason to do so since it is so very commonly the approach the theistic evolution which wants to keep the nature of the creation days an uncertain matter. Yet evolution, as an explanation of the origin of all things, also theistic evolution which really combines contradictory ideas, is wholly foreign to the scriptural account of creation in Genesis.

All the emphases in the creation account stand in bold contrast to an evolutionistic explanation of the origin of all things. Evolution always asserts initial imperfection, followed by gradual improvement. Evolution invariably thinks of matter, in some form, as eternal, and operates with blind forces effecting gradual changes over a vast span of time. Evolution thinks of man as having gradually developed from the lowest forms of life. Evolution does not fit as a background for the gospel.

In bold contrast are all the great emphases of the creation account. At the very beginning we meet God as the one who alone is eternal. He alone is there before all matter, before every other being, before all time and space, have come into existence.

With an act of almighty power He brought the universe, heaven and earth, into existence. No details are given to us concerning this momentous act of our God. Merely the great fact is brought to our attention. Then our focus is immediately directed upon the earth. The earth was to be the dwelling place of man, upon whom God's saving activity, related in Genesis, is directed.

We then hear how in six successive days God modified conditions on this earth and for this earth, and how He supplied this earth with a rich variety of vegetation and animal life. Thus He prepared it as a dwelling place for His foremost creature, man, whom He treated in His own image for fellowship with Himself. To man He gave unrestricted dominion over the earth and all that it contains. Even as God ceased from His task of creation with joy and delight and with full divine satisfaction in all that He had made, so He blessed and

hallowed the seventh day which followed the completion of creation, making it a source of joy and delight for man.

While God was active during the days of creation, His almighty power and His infinite wisdom are constantly in manifestation, God spoke, and it was done. Everything was always perfect as it came forth from God's creative action.

We will want to lose nothing of this glorious creation account. Everything that is here emphasized we will want to bear in mind when we thereupon hear in Scripture how man fell into sin, when we hear how he brought death upon himself and the bondage of corruption upon the whole creation: Above all we want to keep all these emphases in mind when we hear how God in His infinite grace then became active in restoring His foremost creature to fellowship with Himself. For the gospel's sake we want to hold on to everything in the account of God's creation, for this account forms the necessary background for the message of salvation of Genesis and of the entire Scriptures. We can do so, however, only when in every respect we acknowledge uphold the clarity of Scripture.