KIDNER
CLASSIC COMMENTARIES

GENESIS

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Contents

COMMENTARY

A. The Primeval History (chapters 1 – 11)

1. THE STORY OF CREATION (1:1 – 2:3)

1:1, 2. Prologue

1. It is no accident that *God* is the subject of the first sentence of the Bible, for this word dominates the whole chapter and catches the eye at every point of the page: it is used some thirty-five times in as many verses of the story. The passage, indeed the Book, is about him first of all; to read it with any other primary interest (which is all too possible) is to misread it.

The opening expression, *In the beginning*, is more than a bare note of time. The variations on this theme in Isaiah 40ff. show that the beginning is pregnant with the end, and the whole process present to God who is First and Last (e.g. Isa. 46:10; 48:12). Proverbs 8:22f. reveals something of the Godward side of this beginning of creation; John 1:1–3 is more explicit; and the New Testament elsewhere at times reaches back behind it (e.g. John 17:5, 24) into eternity.

Grammatically, this phrase could be translated as introducing a clause completed in verse 3 after a parenthetical verse 2: 'When God began to create … (the earth was without form …), God said, Let

there be light …' This would not be saying that the undeveloped earth was not of God's making; only that creation, in its full sense, still had far to go. But the familiar translation, 'In the beginning God …', is equally grammatical, is supported by all the ancient versions, and affirms unequivocally the truth laid down elsewhere (e.g. Heb. 11:3) that until God spoke, nothing existed.[1]

The meaning of *created* (*bārā'*; cf. 21, 27; 2:3, 4) is best determined from the Old Testament as a whole (including this chapter), where we find that its subject is invariably God, its product may be either things (e.g. Isa. 40:26) or situations (Isa. 45:7, 8, RSV), its companion verbs are chiefly 'to make' and 'to form' (Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:7), and its precise sense varies with its context, which may emphasize either the initial moment of bringing into existence (Isa. 48:3, 7: 'suddenly', 'now') or the patient work of bringing something to perfection (Gen. 2:1–4; cf. Isa. 65:18). In this opening statement it is possible either to see the whole span of the word, so that verse 1 summarizes the whole passage, or (as I prefer) to take it as stating the beginning of the process.

In verses 1, 21, 27 this impressive verb marks three great beginnings; but it does not define a particular way of creating, since in 2:3, 4 it is parallel with *'āśâ* ('make') and covers the whole range of God's work.

2. *And the earth* would be better translated 'Now the earth …', for the construction is exactly that of Jonah 3:3 ('Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city…'). By all normal usage the verse is an expansion of the statement just made, and its own two halves are concurrent.[2] It sets the scene, making *the earth* our vantage point; whatever

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1. Cf., among recent discussions, von Rad, p. 46; B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, p. 31; W. Eichrodt, 'In the Beginning' in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. Anderson and Harrelson (SCM Press, 1962), pp. 1–10; P. Humbert, *ZAW*, LXXVI, 1964, pp. 121–131.
2. If verse 2 were intended to tell of a catastrophe ('And the earth *became* …'), as some have suggested, it would use the Hebrew narrative construction, not the circumstantial construction as here. See the debate between P. W. Heward and F. F. Bruce in *JTVI*, LXVIII, 1946, pp. 13–37. Cf. E. J. Young in *WTJ*, XXIII, 1960–1, pp. 151–178. For a

the total pattern, this is our concern (cf. Ps. 115:16). The sombre terms of 2a throw into relief the mounting glory of the seven days; and if God alone brings form out of formlessness, he alone sustains it. In visions of judgment (Jer. 4:23; Isa. 34:11), chaos comes back, termed *tōhû* and *bōhû* as here. *Tōhû* (*without form*) is used elsewhere to mean, in physical terms, a trackless waste (e.g. Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18), emptiness (Job 26:7), chaos (Isa. 24:10; 34:11; 45:18); and metaphorically, what is baseless or futile (e.g. 1 Sam. 12:21; Isa. 29:21). The rhyming *bōhû*[3] (*void*) is found only twice elsewhere (see above), each time paired with *tōhû*.

The deep (*tĕhôm*) seems to be etymologically akin to (but not derived from) the word *tiamat*,[4] the personified ocean and rival of the gods in the Sumero-Accadian creation myth. But here it is the literal ocean, whatever poetic play is made elsewhere with the taming of its fury and its monsters (Ps. 74:13, 14; 89:9, 10; 104:6, 7; Isa. 51:9, 10). See also on verse 21.

Not in conflict, then, but in evocative activity *the Spirit of God*[5] *was moving* (RSV rightly retains the participle). In the Old Testament the Spirit is a term for God's outgoing energy, creative and sustaining (cf. Job 33:4; Ps. 104:30). Any impression of Olympian detachment which the rest of the chapter might have conveyed is forestalled by the simile of the mother-bird 'hovering' (Moffatt) or fluttering over her brood. The verb reappears in Deuteronomy 32:11 to describe the eagle's movements in stirring its young into flight; this aspect of intimate contact must be kept in mind throughout.

This whole verse is sometimes felt to be out of key with the rest

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broader critique of the 'gap' theory, see B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, pp. 135–144.

3. Arabic *bhy*, 'be empty', gives a probable clue to its meaning.
4. See the well-documented discussion in D. F. Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered* (Tyndale Press, 1964), pp. 10f.
5. Some would translate this 'a mighty wind' (e.g. von Rad, p. 47). But Dan. 7:2, which glances at this passage, shows that a writer who meant to convey such a meaning could do so without requiring his readers to divine it from the familiar expression for the Spirit of God, construed in an unfamiliar way.

of the passage, its conjectured echoes of pagan myths (in which gods and monsters struggle for mastery) producing a calculated[6] or uncalculated[7] dissonance. But the knowledge of these myths has laid a false trail for us, diverting our attention from the familiar fact that God's *normal* method is to work from the formless to the formed. The whole process is creation. If Isaiah 45:18 forbids us to stop with this verse, all that we learn of God's ways from Scripture (e.g. Ps. 139:13–16; Eph. 4:11–16) and experience, to say nothing of the natural sciences, insists that we start with something like it. Indeed, the six days now to be described can be viewed as the positive counterpart of the twin negatives 'without form and void', matching them with form and fullness. They may be set out as follows:[8]

	Form		*Fullness*
Day 1	Light and dark	Day 4	Lights of day and night
Day 2	Sea and sky	Day 5	Creatures of water and air
Day 3	Fertile earth	Day 6	Creatures of the land

For a discussion of this sequence, and of the word 'day', see Additional note, pp. 58ff.

1:3–5. The first day

3. The simple phrase *And God said* precludes some far-reaching errors and stores up a wealth of meaning. These eight specific commands, calling all things into being, leave no room for notions of a universe that is self-existent, or struggled for, or random, or a divine emanation; and the absence of any intermediary implies an extremely rich content for the word 'said'. This may not be at once apparent, for we ourselves know what it is to order things to happen. But our commands, even at their most precise, are mere outlines:

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6. E.g. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, pp. 30–42.
7. E.g. H. Gunkel, *Genesis*[4], pp. 104f., cited in B. S. Childs, op. cit.
8. This table is largely indebted to W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (1946 edn, Eerdmans), p. 29. Cf. Driver, p. 2, using the terms 'preparation' and 'accomplishment'.

they rely on existing materials and agencies to embody them, and the craftsman himself works with what he finds, to produce what he only knows in part. The Creator, on the other hand, in willing an end willed every smallest means to it, his thought shaping itself exactly to the least cell and atom, and his creative word wholly meaningful. One might almost express this immediacy of knowledge by saying that he knows each mode of created existence by experience – only experience is too weak a word: 'Thou knowest it altogether' (Ps. 139:4; cf. Amos 4:13). This is not pantheism: it is taking creatorship seriously. So the New Testament reveals what is already latent here when it calls the Son and Word of God 'the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things were created … and in him all things hold together' (Col. 1:15–17, RSV; cf. John 1:1–4; Heb. 1:2, 3).

Let there be light: we may note in passing that the Vulgate's '*Fiat lux*' gives us the expression 'creation by fiat'. *Light*, which has lent its name to all that is life-giving (John 1:4), truth-giving (2 Cor. 4:6), gladdening (Eccl. 11:7) and pure (1 John 1:5–7), appropriately marks the first step from chaos to order; and as it here precedes the sun,[9] so in the final vision it outlasts it (Rev. 22:5).[10]

4, 5. *God saw … divided … called.* To some of the ancients, day and night suggested warring powers; to modern man, merely a spinning world. Genesis knows nothing of either conflict or chance in this: only of the watchful Creator who assigns to everything its value (4a), place (4b) and meaning (5a). Darkness is part of the whole that is 'very good' (31a, b); it is not abolished, only subordinated. The idea of 'dividing' is specially prominent, both here (cf. 6, 7, 14, 18) and in the law (e.g. Lev. 20:25), since this way lies cosmos (cf. Eph. 4:16; Phil. 1:9, 10) and the other way chaos (Isa. 5:20, 24).

The AV's *the evening and the morning were* gives the misleading impression that the reckoning starts with evening.[11] Rather translate it 'evening came and morning came' (Moffatt; cf. RV, RSV).

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9. See Additional note, pp. 58ff.
10. Cf. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 1 (T. and T. Clark, 1958), p. 167.
11. For an extended discussion, see H. R. Stroes in *VT*, XVI, 1966, pp. 460–475.

On *the first day* (AV), see the Additional note on the days of creation, pp. 58ff.

1:6–8. The second day

The verb underlying *firmament* (*raqia'*) means to beat or stamp (cf. Ezek. 6:11a), often in connection with beaten metal. Job 37:18 shows that we are not meant to rarefy this word into 'expanse' or 'atmosphere': 'Can you, like him, spread out (*tarqia'*) the skies, hard as a molten (i.e. cast metal) mirror?' (RSV). It is pictorial language, like our expression 'the vault of heaven'. In another set of terms we should speak probably of the enveloping vapours being raised clear of the ocean-surface (cf. E. Bevan's reconstruction quoted on p. 59), the two ways of speaking are complementary.

On *divide, divided* (6, 7), see the next paragraph.

1:9–13. The third day

God continues to give form to the world, by the process of differentiation (9, 10; see on 4, 5); but the emphasis begins to shift towards the theme of fullness (11, 12) which will be prominent in the rest of the chapter.

11, 12. *The earth* is empowered to *bring forth* (AV) what is proper to it. Literally verse 11 runs: '… Let the earth vegetate vegetation, herb seeding seed, fruit tree making fruit after its kind.' Comparably, in 20 the waters are to 'swarm with a swarm of living creatures', and in 24 the earth is to 'bring forth' the living creature. This emergence of life is no less 'creation' than was the first act. The two kinds of expression share the account in 21: 'And God *created* … every living creature … that the waters *swarmed with*'; and 25 says, of the beasts which the earth was to '*bring forth*' (24), God '*made*' them.

If this language seems well suited to the hypothesis of creation by evolution (as the present writer thinks), this is not the only scheme it would allow, and its purpose is not to drop a special clue for the present age. Rather it is to show that God has bound together all creatures in a common dependence on their native elements, while giving each the distinctive character of its kind. Each

has an origin which is from one angle natural and from another supernatural; and the natural process is made self-perpetuating and, under God, autonomous. One implication of this is that it is part of godliness to respect the limitations within which we live as natural creatures, as from him. Another is that fertility, so often deified in the ancient world, is a *created* capacity, from the hand of the one God.

1:14–19. The fourth day

Once more the description is unashamedly geocentric. On this, and on the appearing of the sun, etc., so late on the scene, see the Additional note, pp. 58ff. The view expressed there brings verse 14 into a simple relation with verse 4 by regarding the sun as the divider of day from night in each verse; veiled in 4, visible in 14. But again the dominant interest is theological. Sun, moon and stars are God's good gifts, producing the pattern of varied *seasons* (14) in which we thrive (cf. Acts 14:17) and by which Israel was to mark out the year for God (Lev. 23:4). As *signs* (14) they will speak for God, not for fate (Jer. 10:2; cf. Matt. 2:9; Luke 21:25, 28), for they *rule* (16, 18) only as lightbearers, not as powers. In these few simple sentences the lie is given to a superstition as old as Babylon[12] and as modern as a newspaper horoscope.

1:20–23. The fifth day

20. The RVmg reproduces the Hebrew: '… swarm with swarms of living creatures' (see note on 11, 12). *Living creatures* (RSV) are the same expression as 'living soul' in 2:7, where see note. *Fowl* (AV, RV) or *birds* (RSV) are literally 'flying things', and can include insects (cf. Deut. 14:19, 20). *The open firmament* (AV, RV) should be simply *across the firmament* (RSV): it is again the language of how things appear, as one looks up at the dome of the sky.

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12. Cf. *Enuma elish*, V:1, 2: 'He constructed stations for the great gods,
Fixing their astral likenesses as constellations' (*ANET*, p. 67). The belief is more ancient than the poem.

21, 22. The *sea monsters* (*tannînîm*) (RV, RSV; *whales*, AV) are specially noteworthy, since to the Canaanites this was an ominous word, standing for the powers of chaos confronting Baal in the beginning. Here they are just magnificent creatures (like Leviathan in Ps. 104:26; Job 41), enjoying God's blessing with the rest (22). Although in some scriptures these names will symbolize God's enemies (e.g. Isa. 27:1), taunted in the very terms in which Baal exults over them,[13] no doubt is left by this chapter that the most fearsome of creatures were from God's good hand. There may be rebels in his kingdom, but no rivals. To the Canaanites, however, Baal's adversaries were gods like himself, or demons to be propitiated;[14] and to the Babylonians the chaos-monster Tiamat pre-existed the gods. Y. Kaufmann points out how deeply such a view affected non-Israelite religion, for the worshipper could never be sure, as we can, that in serving God there is peace; there were always other unknown quantities in the background.[15]

1:24–31. The sixth day

24. *Let the earth bring forth:* see note on 11. *The living creature*, as in 20, is the same Hebrew expression as 'living soul' in 2:7 (where see note). The *creeping thing*, which suggests to us only the reptiles, is not a scientific classification but a description of the smooth or crawling motion of various kinds of creature. The Hebrew verb has already appeared in 21 ('moves'), evidently to denote the gliding of fish, as in Psalm 104:25. Probably the three kinds of animal in 24 are, broadly, what we should call domesticated animals, small creatures and game.

26. *Let us make man.* In both the opening chapters of Genesis man is portrayed as *in* nature and *over* it, continuous with it and discontinuous. He shares the sixth day with other creatures, is made of dust as they are (2:7, 19), feeds as they feed (1:29, 30) and repro-

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13. See *DOTT*, p. 129, ll.24f., and notes 16, 17, p. 132.
14. *UM*, p. 333, *s.v. tnn.* Also *UT*, p. 498, ditto.
15. *The Religion of Israel* (Allen and Unwin, 1961), chapter II, especially pp. 21–24.

duces with a blessing similar to theirs (1:22, 28a); so he can well be studied partly through the study of them: they are half his context. But the stress falls on his distinctness. *Let us make* stands in tacit contrast with 'Let the earth bring forth' (24); the note of self-communing and the impressive plural proclaim it a momentous step; and this done, the whole creation is complete. *Vis-à-vis* the animals man is set apart by his office (1:26b, 28b; 2:19; cf. Ps. 8:4–8; Jas 3:7) and still more by his nature (2:20); but his crowning glory is his relation to God.

The terms, *in our image, after our likeness*, are characteristically bold. If *image* seems too pictorial a word, there is the rest of Scripture to control it; but at a single stroke it imprints on the mind the central truth about us. The words *image* and *likeness* reinforce one another: there is no 'and' between the phrases, and Scripture does not use them as technically distinct expressions, as some theologians have done, whereby the 'image' is man's indelible constitution as a rational and morally responsible being, and the 'likeness' is that spiritual accord with the will of God which was lost at the fall. The distinction exists, but it does not coincide with these terms. After the fall, man is still said to be in God's image (Gen. 9:6) and likeness (Jas 3:9); nonetheless he requires to be 'renewed … after the image of him that created him' (Col. 3:10; cf. Eph. 4:24). See also 5:1, 3.

When we try to define the image of God, it is not enough to react against a crude literalism by isolating man's mind and spirit from his body. The Bible makes man a unity: acting, thinking and feeling with his whole being. This living creature, then, and not some distillation from him, is an expression or transcription of the eternal, incorporeal creator in terms of temporal, bodily, creaturely existence – as one might attempt a transcription of, say, an epic into a sculpture, or a symphony into a sonnet. Likeness in this sense survived the fall, since it is structural. As long as we are human we are, by definition, in the image of God. But spiritual likeness – in a single word, love – can be present only where God and man are in fellowship; hence the fall destroyed it, and our redemption recreates and perfects it. 'We are God's children now … when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is' (1 John 3:2, RSV; cf. 4:12).

Among the implications of the doctrine we may note that on the Godward side it excludes the idea that our Maker is the 'wholly

Other'. Manward, it requires us to take all human beings infinitely seriously (cf. Gen. 9:6; Jas 3:9). And our Lord implies, further, that God's stamp on us constitutes a declaration of ownership (Matt. 22:20, 21).

Us … our … our. The plural is interpreted by, e.g. Delitzsch and von Rad as including the angels, whom the Old Testament calls at times 'sons of God', or, generically, 'god(s)' (cf. Job 1:6; Ps. 8:5 with Heb. 2:7; Ps. 82:1, 6 with John 10:34, 35). This can claim some support from Genesis 3:22 ('as one of us'); but any implication that others had a hand in our creation is quite foreign to the chapter as a whole and to the challenge in Isaiah 40:14: 'With whom took he counsel?' It is rather the plural of fullness, which is found in the regular word for God (*'ĕlōhîm*) used with a singular verb; and this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament,[16] was to be unfolded as triunity, in the further 'we' and 'our' of John 14:23 (with 14:17).

The *dominion* over all creatures is 'not the content but the consequence' of the divine image (Delitzsch). James 3:7, 8 points out that we still largely exercise it – with a fatal exception. Hebrews 2:6–10 and 1 Corinthians 15:27, 28 (quoting Ps. 8:6) speak of its full reclamation by Jesus, and 1 Corinthians 6:3 promises the exalting of redeemed man above angels (cf. Rev. 4:4). In sad contrast, our human record of exploiting what is at our mercy proves the unfitness of fallen beings to govern, as ourselves ungoverned: cf. the ominous tone of 9:2.

27. The words *male and female*, coming at this juncture, have far-reaching implications, as Jesus made plain when he coupled them with 2:24 to make the two sayings the twin pillars of marriage (Mark 10:6, 7). To define humanity as bisexual is to make each partner the complement of the other, and to anticipate the New Testament doctrine of the sexes' spiritual equality ('all one', Gal. 3:28; 'heirs together', 1 Pet. 3:7b; see also Mark 12:25). This is reaffirmed in Genesis 2:18–25, together with their temporal inequality (cf. 1 Pet. 3:5–7a; 1 Cor. 11:7–12; 1 Tim. 2:12, 13), and again in 5:1, 2.

28. *And God blessed them.* To bless is to bestow not only a gift but a function (cf. 1:22; 2:3; cf. also the parting blessings of Isaac, Jacob

16. See Introduction, pp. 36ff.

and Moses), and to do so with warm concern. At its highest, it is God turning full-face to the recipient (cf. Num. 6:24–26) in self-giving (Acts 3:26). On the implications of *subdue*, see the Additional note to chapter 3, p. 77.

29, 30. The assigning of *every green plant for food* (RSV) to all creatures must not be pressed to mean that all were once herbivorous, any more than to mean that all plants were equally edible to all. It is a generalization, that directly or indirectly all life depends on vegetation, and the concern of the verse is to show that all are fed from God's hand. See also on 9:3.

31. *God saw* … 'It is a part of the history of creation that God completed his work and confronted it as a completed totality' (K. Barth).[17] By his grace something other than himself is granted not only existence but a measure of self-determination. And if the details of his work were pronounced 'good' (4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25), the whole is *very good*. Old and New Testament alike endorse this in their call to a thankful acceptance of things material (e.g. Ps. 104:24; 1 Tim. 4:3–5) as both from and for God.

2:1–3. The seventh day

God's finished task is sealed in the words *he rested* (2, 3; literally 'ceased'; from *šābat*, the root of 'sabbath'). It is the rest of achievement, not inactivity, for he nurtures what he creates; we may compare the symbolism of Jesus 'seated' after his finished redemption (Heb. 8:1; 10:12), to dispense its benefits.

Our Lord based his own constructive use of the sabbath on this understanding of the divine rest ('My Father is working still', John 5:17, RSV), and his double-edged saying in Mark 2:27, 28 preserves the pattern of gift (*God blessed*) and claim (*and hallowed*, RV, RSV) implicit in verse 3. Characteristically he went to 'the beginning' for his teaching; cf. Mark 10:6.

But God's rest was pregnant with more than the gift of the sabbath: it is still big with promise for the believer, who is summoned to share it (Heb. 3:7 – 4:11). As G. von Rad has well said:

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17. *Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, p. 222.

'The declaration mounts, as it were, to the place of God himself and testifies that with the living God there is rest … Even more, that God has "blessed", "sanctified" … this rest means that' the author 'does not consider it as something for God alone but as a concern of the world. The way is being prepared, therefore, for … the final, saving good.'[18] The formula that rounded off each of the six days with the onset of evening and morning is noticeably absent, as if to imply the 'infinite perspective' (Delitzsch) of God's sabbath.

Additional note on the days of creation

The symmetry of the scheme of Genesis 1 raises the question whether we are meant to understand the chapter chronologically or in some other way. The idea of 'form and fullness' could conceivably have imposed the present pattern on the material, some of which is displayed in a different order in chapter 2 in the interests of a different emphasis. Or again, as Karl Barth sees it, the mention of light before that of the sun and moon could be read as 'an open protest against all and every kind of sun-worship'[19] – in which case the polemical aim would need to be taken into account as contributing to the structure. Another theory makes the six days a sequence of days of instruction divinely given to the author, not days of the creation itself; but this largely rests on a misunderstanding of the word 'made', in Exodus 20:11.[20] Again, a liturgical interest could account for the scheme of days, if it could be substantiated that this 'hymn' of creation was composed for a seven-day New Year Festival in Israel akin to the *Akitu* Babylonian rite[21] – a hypothesis rather slenderly based. Yet again, it may be urged that the order belongs to the poetic form of the passage, and must not be overpressed, since the author's concern is to display before us the visible world as God's handiwork, not to inform us that this feature is older than

18. *Genesis*, p. 60.
19. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, pp. 120f.
20. P. J. Wiseman, *Creation Revealed in Six Days* (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1948), pp. 33f.
21. Hooke, p. 36.

that.[22] Just as it would be impossibly prosaic to cross-question the author of, e.g. Job 38 on 'the waterskins of the heavens' or 'the cords of Orion', so it could be the wrong approach to this passage to expect its pattern of days to be informative rather than aesthetic.

It may be that one or other of these suggestions does justice to the intention of the chapter. Yet to the present writer the march of the days is too majestic a progress to carry no implication of ordered sequence; it also seems over-subtle to adopt a view of the passage which discounts one of the primary impressions it makes on the ordinary reader. It is a story, not only a statement. As with all narrating, it demanded a choice of standpoint, of material to include, and of method in the telling. In each of these, simplicity has been a dominant concern. The language is that of every day, describing things by their appearance; the outlines of the story are bold, free of distracting exceptions and qualifications, free also to group together matters that belong together (so that trees, for example, anticipate their chronological place in order to be classified with vegetation), to achieve a grand design in which the demands now of time-sequence, now of subject-matter, control the presentation, and the whole reveals the Creator and his preparing a place for us.

The view that the chapter is intended to reveal the general sequence of creation as it affected this earth, is based on the apparent character of the writing. But it is reinforced, one may think, by the remarkable degree of correspondence that can be found between this sequence and the one implied by current science. This has often been pointed out, and not always by those who set any store on the factual accuracy of Scripture in passages of this sort, as the following extract from Edwyn Bevan's essay, 'The religious value of myths in the Old Testament', will show:

> The stages by which the earth comes to be what it is cannot indeed be precisely fitted to the account which modern science would give of the process, but in principle they seem to anticipate the modern scientific account by a remarkable flash of imagination, which a Christian may also call inspiration.

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22. J. A. Thompson, 'Creation' (article in *NBD*, p. 271); cf. D. F. Payne *Genesis One Reconsidered*, pp. 19–23.

> Supposing we could be transported backward in time to different moments in the past of our planet, we should see it first in a condition in which there was no land distinguishable from the water and only a dim light coming from the invisible sun through the thick volumes of enveloping cloud: at a later moment, as the globe dried, land would have appeared; again at a later moment low forms of life, animal and vegetable, would have begun; sooner or later in the process the cloud-masses would have become so thin and broken that a creature standing on earth would see above him sun and moon and stars; at a still later moment we should see the earth of great primeval monsters; and lastly we should see the earth with its present fauna and flora, and the final product of animal evolution, Man.[23]

The *days of creation* may be similarly understood: they give the reader a simple means of relating the work of God in creation to the work of God here and now in history. While a scientific account would have to speak of ages, not days, and would group them to mark the steps that are scientifically significant, the present account surveys the same scene for its theological significance. With this in view it speaks of days, not ages, and groups them into a week. The significance of the week is explicit in the sabbath-hallowing (2:3; cf. Exod. 20:11; 31:17) which makes man's proper rhythm of work and rest a reminder and miniature of the Creator's; and the division of the period into days may be meant to imply no more than this.[24] Yet days are not essential to the idea of the sabbath, for this can be expressed in longer units (Lev. 25:4, 8), and an independent reason suggests itself for the term. It is simply the *brevity* of a day.

To a modern reader this at once raises the question of scientific accuracy. One may argue that 'day' can bear the sense of 'epoch' (cf., e.g. Ps. 90:4; Isa. 4:2), or that days of God have no human analogies (as Augustine,[25] and Origen[26] before him, urged); others will take the days literally and find proof of human fallibility in them: a

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23. Edwyn Bevan, in Hooke, p. 161. Quoted by permission of the Clarendon Press, Oxford.
24. Cf. D. F. Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered*, pp. 17ff.
25. *The City of God*, XI. vi.
26. *De Principiis*, iv. 3, cited by E. Bevan, in Hooke, p. 155.

husk of factual error concealing the good grains of theology in the chapter. The assumption common to these interpretations is that God would not have us picture the creation as compressed into a mere week. But this may be exactly what God does intend us to do. The creation story has stood as a bulwark against a succession of fashionable errors – polytheism, dualism, the eternity of matter, the evil of matter, astrology – and not least, against every tendency to empty human history of meaning. It resists this nihilism explicitly, in displaying man as God's image and regent; but also implicitly, in presenting the tremendous acts of creation as a mere curtain-raiser to the drama that slowly unfolds throughout the length of the Bible. The prologue is over in a page; there are a thousand to follow.

If every generation has needed this emphasis, perhaps none has had greater need of it than the age of scientific knowledge. The scientific account of the universe, realistic and indispensable as it is, overwhelms us with statistics that reduce our apparent significance to vanishing-point. Not the prologue, but the human story itself, is now the single page in a thousand, and the whole terrestrial volume is lost among uncatalogued millions. In face of these immensities we should not dare to set store on our own time and place, but for the divine word which orientates us and reveals the true proportion. Through the apparent naïvety of this earth-centred and history-centred account God says to each generation, whether it is burdened with the weight of factual knowledge which our own possesses, or with the misleading fantasies of the ancient religions, 'Stand here, on this earth and in this present, to get the meaning of the whole. See this world as my gift and charge to you, with the sun, moon and stars as its lamps and timekeepers, and its creatures under your care. See the present age as the time to which my creative work was moving, and the unconscious aeons before it as "but a few days", like the years which Jacob gave for Rachel.'

This interpretation may leave us dissatisfied on two counts. We may object, first, that the author shows no consciousness of speaking otherwise than literally, and secondly, that this reading of the chapter makes it guilty of saying one thing and meaning another.

The first point may well be true, but it is hardly an objection. We know that the full meaning of an inspired utterance was often hidden from the speaker: even Caiaphas exemplifies this, and the

same is said of Daniel and of the prophets.[27] The latent truth does not make their words any less their own; nor do we have to shut our eyes to it, as though the full flower of meaning were less authentic than the bud.

The second point may seem more weighty. If the 'days' were not days at all, would God have countenanced the word? Does he trade in inaccuracies, however edifying? The question hinges on the proper use of language. A God who made no concessions to our ways of seeing and speaking would communicate to us no meaning. Hence the phenomenological language of the chapter (like our own talk of 'sunrise', 'dewfall', etc.) and its geocentric standpoint; but hence also the heavy temporal foreshortening which turns ages into days. Both are instruments of truth, diagrams enabling us to construe and not misconstrue a totality too big for us. It is only pedantry that would quarrel with terms that simplify in order to clarify.

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27. See John 11:49–53; Dan. 12:8, 9; 1 Pet. 1:10–12.