

Creation
in
Biblical Perspective

Report
of the
Commission on Theology
and
Church Relations



THE LUTHERAN CHURCH — MISSOURI SYNOD

CREATION IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

A Study Document

The present study was undertaken by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod as an initial response to the reactions of a number of people in the Synod to Resolution 2-31 of the 47th regular convention of our church body, assembled in New York, July 7—14, 1967. The resolution in question deals with eight overtures submitted to the convention touching on questions concerning the doctrine of creation. An examination of the overtures themselves and of reactions from the field to Resolution 2-31 since the time of the New York convention would seem to indicate two things in particular, namely:

1. That the so-called hermeneutical question is troubling many pastors and lay people. That is to say, questions have been raised about both the nature of the language and the literary forms used in the early chapters of Genesis. Very specifically, queries have been raised as to whether these particular chapters are, either wholly or in part, symbolical or even parabolical in their use of language, or whether they are to be understood and interpreted literally or even literalistically.

2. That confusion on the matter of literary form and the nature of language as these occur in the early chapters of Genesis may tend to divert attention from the role of the Biblical doctrine on creation within the life of the church and of the individual Christian.

In view of these facts the Commission on Theology and Church Relations resolved to work through all of Holy Scripture for the purpose of discovering what it says on the subject of God's creation. In pursuing this study, the commission quickly discovered that it was not dealing with one doctrine in isolation from others. The Biblical teaching regarding creation touches on almost every other aspect of the Christian faith. This particular doctrine is related especially to the subject of Christology, since the Second Person of the Trinity is not only the Agent of God's creation and preservation (John 1:3; Col. 1:15-17) of the world but is also its Redeemer (Col. 1:19-23). That is to say, the doctrine of creation, apart from the Gospel, would not provide that comfort and strength for our faith which the Biblical revelation is designed to offer. The Scriptures stress the fact that their purpose is to "instruct [men] for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and to make the man of God "complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17). What the Scriptures have to say, therefore, on the subject of creation must be understood in the light of this central purpose. It is man, created by God but fallen into sin by his own rebellion, who has been redeemed and who is to be made wise unto salvation.

The present study does not propose to answer all the questions which may trouble any Christian with respect to the whole doctrine of creation and to the way in which the Scriptures deal with this subject. Instead it is limited to the task of assembling and organizing in a coherent and meaningful way the many passages and pericopes of the Scriptures which take up the subject of creation. The commission is conscious of the fact that additional studies on the subject of creation may have to be prepared to deal with certain specifics that are not taken up in the present essay.

The commission felt that it would be not only desirable but imperative to have an overview of what the sacred authors themselves say on the matter of creation. This first step seemed essential for developing an appreciation of both the unity and the variety in the Biblical witness to this particular doctrine.

Our study on the Biblical view of creation is divided into the following five parts:

- I. The Beginning of Creation
- II. The Fact and the Origin of Evil
- III. God's Continuing Creation and Preservation
- IV. Redemption and Restoration
- V. Man's Response to God's Creation

A sixth part summarizes the major conclusions of the study.

I. The Beginning of Creation

The first 10 words in the Bible report the beginning of creation. They read, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Scriptures, therefore, know of a "before" that belongs only to God and is spoken of in another place as follows: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." (Ps. 90:2)

Just how God created the heavens and the earth the text does not say. Holy Scripture teaches that heaven and earth came into being as a "creation out of nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*). On this point it says: "By faith we understand that the world was created by the Word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear" (Heb. 11:3). The Scriptures do not dwell particularly on the creation of matter. They are more concerned to tell us how God took the earth, which was at first "without form and void," and set it in order so that it might become a habitation fit for living beings.

In three successive days, each marked off by evening and morning, God, by His command, "Let there be," created light and the firmament of heaven, separated the water from the land, and caused the earth

to bring forth vegetation, plants and trees, each bearing seed after its own kind. Not until the fourth day did God make sun, moon, and stars, assigning them the task of being "for signs and for seasons and for days and years." The creatures which inhabit the air and the water He created out of the waters on the fifth day, and on the sixth the earth was commanded to bring forth living creatures—the beasts of the field and all kinds of cattle. Finally, on the sixth day God created man, male and female, in His own image and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it (cf. Gen. 1:28 ff.). He saw that it was all very good. Then on the seventh day, as we read, God "rested from all His work which He had done" (Gen. 2:3) and found pleasure in His creation.

Gen. 1:1 to 2:3 appears to be a unit, complete in itself. To it there is added, however, a second unit beginning at Gen. 2:4. This second unit supplements the first by offering a more detailed account of the creation of man and woman and of the Garden of Eden as the place of their first residence. Both parts of this early Genesis account form a necessary preparation for the account of the fall into sin, which will be treated in the second part of this study.

The sequence of creative acts recorded in the part beginning at Gen. 2:4 is given as follows:

1. God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. (Gen. 2:7)

2. God planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and there He put the man whom He had formed to till it and keep it (Gen. 2:15). In this garden there was the tree of life as well as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Man was given permission to eat of every tree in the garden with the exception of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God warned man that "in the day that you eat of it you shall die." (Gen. 2:17)

3. Out of a rib, taken from Adam while he lay in a deep sleep, God made for him a woman and brought her to Adam, who recognized her at once as "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." (Gen. 2:23)

God directed these first two people, as He had the other living creatures, to "be fruitful and multiply." This was His way of indicating that creation was to continue through those countless generations which God Himself had in mind for everything that He had made.

References to the Genesis Creation Account in the Rest of Scripture

Genesis 1 and 2 form the opening chapters of our Scriptures. What they say is basic to what is found in other parts of our Bible on this same subject. Our canonical Scriptures repeatedly allude to the events recorded in these early chapters. The following tabulation will indicate to what extent that is the case:

1. *Heaven and Earth*

References to heaven and earth and to God as the Creator of heaven and earth are found at Gen. 14:19, 22; Gen. 24:3; Deut. 4:39; 2 Chron. 2:12; Ps. 69:34; Ps. 89:11; 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; 146:6; Is. 37:16; 40:12; Jer. 32:17; 51:15; Amos 9:6; Jonah 1:9; Matt. 11:25; Luke 10:21; Acts 4:24; 14:15; 17:24; Col. 1:16-17; Rev. 10:6; 14:7.

2. *Formlessness* (Gen. 1:2); *Chaos* (Is. 45:18)

3. *Light*

Is. 45:7; Jer. 31:35; 2 Cor. 4:6

4. *Firmament*

Job 9:8; Ps. 8:3; 96:5; 102:25; 136:5; 104:2; Prov. 8:27; Is. 40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12; 45:18; 48:13; 51:13; Jer. 10:12; Heb. 1:10; 2 Peter 3:5

5. *The Sea*

Ps. 33:7; 69:1-3; 95:5; 146:6; Prov. 8:28; Jer. 5:22; Jonah 1:9; Acts 4:24; 14:15

6. *Sun, Moon, and Stars*

A reminder is in place here of the purpose assigned by God to the heavenly bodies in Genesis 1. They were made to "separate the day from the night," to "be for signs and for seasons and for days and years," and "to give light upon the earth." The sun is to rule by day and the moon by night. The stars get only a brief notice in the creation account of Genesis 1. All it says is that "He made the stars also."

Later on in Scripture, when sun, moon, and the stars are spoken of, it is done quite frequently for the purpose of forbidding Israel to follow in the footsteps of the heathen, who perverted the purpose of these heavenly bodies by deifying and worshiping them. Israel was to remember that these heavenly bodies were not deities but creatures, made by God to glorify Him and to serve mankind. Relevant passages on this point are the following: Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 2 Kings 23:5; 23:11; Ps. 8:3; 74:16; 104:19-23; 136:7-9; Ezek. 8:16; Jer. 8:2; 31:35; Amos 5:26; Job 31:26-28; (cf. Acts 7:43); Matt. 5:45.

Into this context belongs what the Old Testament has to say against the worship of Baal, the sun god, and of Astarte or Ashtoreth, the moon goddess of the ancient Semitic peoples. This kind of worship represented an inversion of the Creator-creature relationship. It constituted a gross perversion of the purpose for which these heavenly bodies had been created.

7. *The Birds and Sea Animals, Especially the Sea Monsters*

Ps. 8:6-8; 104:25-26; Job 41; Leviathan

8. *The Cattle and Beasts of the Earth*

Ps. 8:6-7

9. *Creation by Fiat, That Is, by the Word of God*

Ps. 33:6; John 1:1-3; Heb. 11:3

10. *Creation of Man and Woman*

Gen. 6:7; Deut. 4:32; Eccl. 7:29; Is. 43:1; 45:12; Mark 10:6; Matt. 19:4; 1 Cor. 11:9; Col. 3:10; 1 Tim. 2:13

11. *Man Is Created in the Image of God*

Gen. 9:6; James 3:9; (cf. also Col. 3:10 and Eph. 4:24)

12. *Man's Dominion over the Earth*

Ps. 8:6-8; Gen. 9:2; James 3:7

13. *The Seven Days of Genesis 1 and 2*

Compared with other aspects of the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 there are very few references in Scripture to the seven days of the creation week. They are given at Ex. 20:8-11; 31:14-17; and Heb. 4:4 and refer to the six days on which God labored and to the seventh as the day on which He rested. As such the seventh day served as the pattern for and as the validation of the Sabbath in Israel and as a type of the eternal rest awaiting the children of God.

14. *The Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life*

Allusions to the Garden of Eden and to the tree of life occur throughout all of Scripture, namely, at Gen. 4:16; Gen. 13:10; Is. 51:3; Ezek. 28:11-19; 31:7-9; 36:33-35; Joel 2:3; Prov. 3:18; 13:12; 15:4; Rev. 2:7; 22:1-5.

15. *The Creation of Heaven and Earth and of All That Is in Them Is for the Sacred Authors an Established Fact*

The details of the Genesis account live on in the inspired writings of our Bible. The sacred authors view life and history as beginning with God's mighty act of calling all things into being.

II. The Origin of Evil in God's Creation

Scripture tells us not only that "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" and that He saw everything which He had made was good; it also indicates that soon after creation evil entered into the world. Sin corrupted God's good creation by turning man, the creature made in the image of God, into a rebel against the will of His own Creator.

The Scriptures trace the corruption of God's creation back to a great temptation. It was staged by a serpent, which is identified in Rev. 12:9 as Satan (the devil). This most subtle of all the "wild creatures" is described as persuading man to disobey God's specific command not to eat of a certain tree in the Garden of Eden.

The story is given in Genesis 3. There the Scriptures place before us the account of man's fall into sin. The event is full of mystery. The first human pair, Adam and Eve, are described as being in the Garden of Eden, where the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as well as the tree of life were found. Adam and Eve were forbidden on pain of death to eat of the tree of knowl-

edge. Nevertheless, the serpent spoke to Eve and tempted her to eat of this forbidden fruit. Deceived by the serpent with a promise that she would know good and evil and so be like God, the mother of us all ate, then gave some of the fruit to Adam, who also yielded to temptation and partook of the forbidden fruit. Immediately, as we are told, "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked" (Gen. 3:7). They tried to cover their nakedness and to hide from God; yet they were called to account by the Lord on the principle that they were His creatures who as such owed Him obedience.

God then cursed the serpent and in that connection uttered the prophetic words of Gen. 3:15: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."

The woman received her punishment in the form of pain in childbearing, the man in the form of a curse upon the ground. This was to bring forth thorns and thistles and cause man to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow until he returned to the dust, from which he had been taken. Then, in order that Adam and Eve might not put forth their hands to eat of the tree of life and so live forever, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden.

A close reading of the Bible shows that whatever follows the story of man's disobedience serves as a kind of commentary on what is recorded in Genesis 3. While it is not the purpose of this study to enter into a discussion of the hermeneutical questions raised by the various ways in which the earliest chapters of the Scriptures have been interpreted, it will be useful to point out that Genesis 3 has puzzled many a reader. Many generations of both Jews and Christians have understood it literally; others have sought to interpret it symbolically or even parabolically; in more recent times not a few have called it a "myth," without necessarily wanting to discredit the account. Yet regardless of the way in which these particular problems in interpretation have been handled, the Scriptures themselves insist that we take very seriously the matter of man's fall as described in Genesis 3. For that reason the present study is designed as a survey of what the Bible itself says on the doctrine of creation, including the fall of man into sin. The purpose of the paragraphs which follow is to exhibit the way in which the Scriptures themselves understand these matters.

1. *The Fall*

We have shown above (Section I, item 14) that references to the Garden of Eden and to the tree of life occur again and again in Holy Scripture. In the same way an awareness of the sin of Adam and Eve runs through the Scriptures. The New Testament in particular makes clear references to the fall and its consequences. "Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (Rom. 5:14). "As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall

all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor." (1 Tim. 2:14)

2. The Serpent

The serpent, whose part in the narrative of the fall has puzzled interpreters of all ages, appears frequently in the Scripture in connection with sin. "The wicked go astray from the womb, they err from their birth, speaking lies. They have venom like the venom of a serpent" (Ps. 58:3-4). "Deliver me, O Lord, from evil men; preserve me from violent men, who plan evil in their heart and stir up wars continually. They make their tongue sharp as a serpent's, and under their lips is the poison of vipers." (Ps. 140:1-3)

It looks like a reference both to the peace of Eden and to the curse upon the serpent when Isaiah, speaking of the new heaven and the new earth, says: "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lions shall eat straw like the ox; and dust shall be the serpent's food" (Is. 65:25). Micah foretold that the nations should "lick dust like a serpent" (Micah 7:17). It seems like a reference to the subtlety of the serpent (Gen. 3:1) when Christ instructed His disciples to "be wise as serpents" (Matt. 10:17). There is an apparent allusion to the serpent of Genesis 3 in the statement of the Lord to the seventy disciples, who returned with joy from the mission on which they had been sent and reported: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name." To this Jesus replied: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you." (Luke 10:17-19)

An unmistakable reference to the serpent of Genesis 3 is found in 2 Cor. 11:3: "I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

3. Satan's Part in Man's Fall

Clear passages of Scripture compel us to understand that in Genesis 3 we are dealing with more than an ordinary reptile. It was an evil spirit, in the form and guise of a serpent, which tempted and deceived our first parents. Jesus Himself gave us a clue in His words to certain of His contemporaries when He said: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). On this point St. John wrote: "He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning." (1 John 3:8)

The Book of Revelation makes the positive identification of the serpent with Satan in its statement: "And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). Later on John sees in pro-

phetic vision an angel coming down from heaven to bind the devil and Satan "for a thousand years . . . that he should deceive the nations no more." (Rev. 20:2-3)

4. The Serpent's Seed

As there are plain references in the rest of Scripture to the serpent, so there seem to be a few allusions to the seed of the serpent mentioned in Gen. 3:15. Jesus Himself, for example, called the Pharisees and Sadducees a "brood of vipers." (Matt. 23:33)

In Elymas the magician Paul recognized a seed of the serpent. Hence he rebuked him with the words: "You son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, full of all deceit and villainy." (Acts 13:10)

At Rom. 16:20 St. Paul makes a very clear reference to the contest between the descendants of Eve and the seed of the serpent. The Scriptures portray Christ and Satan as the two great adversaries. Jesus is the Prince of Life (Acts 3:15), Prince and Savior (Acts 5:31); Satan, by way of contrast, is called the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2). The Christian church has seen in these statements of the Scriptures a commentary on Gen. 3:15, which says: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed."

5. The Curse on the Ground

The curse on the ground pronounced on Adam for transgressing God's command is alluded to at Gen. 5:29 and 8:21.

6. Death as the Consequence of Sin

In accord with the threat of death for man's transgression, the end of Adam is described in starkly simple words: "And he died" (Gen. 5:5). Scripture speaks of sin as the real cause of the death of all men. "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin . . . so death spread to all men because all men sinned." (Rom. 5:12; cf. also Rom. 6:23; Ps. 49:10-12)

7. The Fall and Universal Sin

According to Genesis 4, Cain became the first murderer. In chapters 6 through 8 of Genesis we have a description of the universal wickedness of men before the flood. In such passages as Gen. 6:5; 8:21; and Rom. 5:19 man is spoken of as a sinner from birth.

In this way the fall of our first parents, as recorded for us in Genesis 3, underlies and pervades all the rest of Scripture in its many descriptions of the predicament and rebellion of man. The tragic events recorded in this chapter provide the backdrop for all of the doctrines offered us in the Biblical revelation.

III. God's Continuing Creation and Preservation

When God began His creation, as we are told in Genesis 1 and 2, He made provisions for the continuing creation and the preservation of His creatures. The plants He created were to bear seed from which other plants should spring. Living creatures were created

male and female in order that they might be fruitful and multiply. This ongoing propagation of life through the seed of plants and through the union of living organisms, including man in his sexual relationships, is really a way of describing God's act of continuing creation.

1. *The Fact of God's Continuing Creation Gives Man Worth*

Of subhuman species the psalmist says: "When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground" (Ps. 194:30). Of himself the psalmist confessed: "Thou didst form my inward parts, Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise Thee, for Thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are Thy works! Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in Thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:13-16). Job prayed: "Thy hands fashioned and made me. . . . Remember that Thou hast made me of clay. . . . Didst Thou not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? Thou didst clothe me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. Thou hast granted me life. . . ." (Job 10:8-12; cf. 31:15; 33:4)

Though God continues to create through powers imparted to His creatures, it is still He Himself who creates. All creatures are the product of His power. Hence, we confess not only: "I believe in God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," but add the words: "And of all things, visible and invisible." In full accord with these Biblical statements on God's continuing creation we apply this article of faith to ourselves and say with Luther: "I believe that God has made *me* and all creatures, that He has given *me* my body and soul and all things, my reason and all my senses."

This confession exalts man. It gives him true worth. No matter how humble and lowly, every man can hold up his head and say: "I am a creature of God. I was given that unique kind of consciousness which invites me to respond with such leaping for joy as is recorded of John the Baptist even before his birth." (Luke 1:44)

2. *God Is Concerned for the Preservation of the Creatures He Continues to Bring to Life*

When God began His creation and arranged for living beings to multiply and to fill the earth, He also made preparations for the preservation of these many and varied creatures. The world of plants was meant to provide food for animate beings, including man. Genesis 1 reports how God said to man: "Behold I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the

breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." (Gen. 1:29-30)

The following passages speak very directly of God's preservation of animate creatures by providing the necessary sustenance: Ps. 104:10-15; 104:27-28; 147:9; Matt. 6:26.

3. *God Rules and Governs His Creation with a View to its Preservation and Welfare*

The Scriptures bear witness to the fact that God rules and governs what He created and continues to fashion. His rule over the physical universe and the forces of nature is graphically expressed in the eloquent words of God to Job:

"Who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth from the womb; when I made clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band, and prescribed bounds for it, and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far you shall come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed'? Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place, that it might take hold of the skirts of the earth. . . . ? Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been revealed to you. . . . ? Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war? What is the way to the place where the light is distributed, or where the east wind is scattered upon the earth? Who has cleft a channel for the torrents of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is. . . . to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and to make the ground put forth grass? . . . Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion? Can you lead forth the Mazzaroth in their season, or can you guide the Bear with its children? Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on earth?" (Job 38:8-33)

As God regulates the cosmos, He rules the animal world so that each one fulfills its appointed function (Job 39). Above all, God's government extends over the nations of the world and their peoples. "He made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). Scripture never lets us forget that in spite of all the pretensions of earthly rulers it is God who holds the reins of government in the earth. He delivers Israel from bondage in Egypt. He overthrows Pharaoh's hosts (Ex. 6:6-7; 15:4). He gives Israel the Promised Land (Joshua 1:3-6). He commands the remembrance of Amalek to be blotted out from under heaven. (Deut. 25:17-19; 1 Sam. 15:1-9)

God's governance extends over all creatures. Those who fear Him experience it as infinite compassion (Ps. 78:38 ff.). His benevolence extends even to the animal world (Jonah 4:11; Deut. 25:4; Luke 12:6; Matt. 10:29). At the same time His governance is stern in that it visits

stark retribution on those who despise Him. (2 Chron. 36:16-18)

In this way God continues to look after His creation. He persists in creating man and beast. He continues to provide sustenance for His creatures. He rules the universe, the nations, individuals. We are reminded that He looks out for the welfare of oxen and even of sparrows (Matt. 10:29). Endowed with the responsibility of dominion, man is invited to work for his Creator in the preservation and improvement of the human environment as a way of expressing his appreciation of God's gifts and of preventing love from turning into lust and dominion into domination.

IV. Redemption and Restoration

On the very day that man fell and the curse descended on man and his works, God indicated that He would continue to sustain His creation. In fact He gave man a message of hope and of restoration. Throughout its history the church has understood the strange pronouncement of God to the serpent as a word of promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." (Gen. 3:15)

The note of hope in this promise of a deliverance, wrapped in a curse on the deceiver of man, grows stronger in Moses, the prophets, and in the Psalms. Still later and more clearly Isaiah proclaimed:

The people who walked in darkness . . . on them has light shined. Thou hast multiplied the nation, Thou hast increased its joy; they rejoice before Thee as with joy at harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, Thou hast broken as in the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder, and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Is. 9:2-6)

Malachi, last in the line of Old Testament prophets, announced the nearness of the Deliverer: "Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way before Me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts." (Mal. 3:1)

These and many similar prophecies and promises in the Old Testament Jesus understood as being spoken of Himself. After His resurrection He said to His disciples: "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. . . . Thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in His name to all nations." (Luke 24:44-47)

The apostles taught such an understanding of the Old Testament, as witness Peter's words: "To Him [Christ] all the prophets bear witness that every one

who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name." (Acts 10:43; cf. Acts 3:18-24)

In the New Testament Jesus is portrayed as the Redeemer from sin and its consequences. He is the One who restores fallen man to God's favor. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in Him all things were created. . . . He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead. . . . For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross." (Col. 1:15-20)

When the fruit of this redemption, especially of man as God's foremost of visible creatures, becomes fully manifest at the end of time, it will become apparent that the rest of the creature world will share in the fruits of Christ's work. Here is how St. Paul puts it:

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom. 8:19-23)

When that day comes, the present heaven and earth will pass away (Matt. 24:35; 5:18; 2 Peter 3:10). They will be replaced by new heavens and a new earth in which not sin but righteousness will dwell for good. (Is. 65:17; 66:22; 2 Peter 3:13; Rev. 21:1 ff.)

While the children of God wait eagerly for the Lord's appearing to establish a new heaven and a new earth, a measure of those blessings which were once bestowed on man at the beginning and lost through sin is being restored in them. Through the preaching of the Word and through Holy Baptism men come to faith in their Redeemer. So God grants them a new birth through the Holy Spirit (John 1:12-13; 3:3, 5; Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 1:3). They become new creatures (2 Cor. 5:17). In this way the divine image, in which God originally created man and which man lost through the fall, begins to be renewed in the Christian. In his life of sanctification the individual Christian puts on that new nature which is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24). He puts on "the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator." (Col. 3:10)

Thus the Christian bears in his being a kind of firstfruits. These offer the promise that God, who in the beginning created all things and still preserves them, and who through His only-begotten Son redeemed mankind from sin and its curse, will in the end also restore to all who are in Christ everything that the first Adam lost.

V. Man's Response to God's Creation

The world is the product of God's creative will and action. Everything in it is designed to respond to its Creator. The kind of response due God from men is described by the Chronicler in the words of David:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as Head above all. (1 Chron. 29:10-11)

Man's due response is made in solidarity with all of creation, in the totality of his being, in community and continuity with God's people, and in the particularity of his trust in the only true God. To each of these items we must devote the attention given to it in the Scriptures.

1. Response in Solidarity

The psalmist boldly invites the heavens to be glad and the earth to rejoice. The trees of the wood are asked to join in a new song accompanied by the sea as it roars and the field as it exults in declaring God's glory (cf. Psalm 96). Even the mountains skipped like rams (Ps. 114:4) when Israel left Egypt.

To be sure, only man can respond with the gift we call language. For he was created in God's image to call things by their names even as God brought out the hosts of heaven, calling them all by name (Gen. 2:19; Is. 40:26). While God intended man to be the crown of creation, He did not create him for splendid isolation but for solidarity with the rest of creation.

In point of fact, all of creation is bound to man. It joins him not only in his anguish but also in his expectations of liberation. On his account the created order suffers from what the apostle calls "the servitude of corruption" (Rom. 8:21). Everything that has come into being and is sustained by God's creative power was made for fullness; but it experiences disappointment and frustration until such time as God's children are set free (Rom. 8:19-23) from the burdens of an existence marred by man's rebellion against his Creator.

Saint John the Divine, therefore, was given a vision of the universe at worship, with "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all therein, saying, 'To Him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever'" (Rev. 5:13). To that end Jesus was given the name *Kyrios* at His ascension so that at this name every knee should bow of things in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. (Phil. 2:10)

The response due God is no less than cosmic. Men were created to be part of this vast chorus of praise to Him who is "the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Is. 40:28). Everywhere throughout the universe God's will is done except among men; and so they must be taught to pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

A proper response takes place from a posture of

dependence and humility. Men may insist on their autonomy and resist the will of their Creator, yet they were made in God's image. They owe whatever they have and are to His gracious providence. They live in history, which had a beginning and will have an end. It, too, therefore, stands under God's direction and judgment. What we creatures have is to be thought of as the gift of that God who "has put eternity into man's mind" and intends that "everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil." God has made it so in order that men should fear before Him. (Cf. Eccl. 3:10-15)

2. Response in Totality

The response due God is to flow from the totality of each creature of His. No part of man is excluded from this obligation. The psalmist does not hesitate to include his "kidneys," a word sometimes translated "heart," as in the RSV. They instructed him, he says (Ps. 16:7), so that his most inward thoughts were moved by the Spirit, directing him how to serve and please God and put his confidence in Him. Mary exalts God in soul and spirit (Luke 1:46-47). The apostle asks that we present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. (Rom. 12:1)

Nowhere in Scripture is there a suggestion that man's proper response to God is limited to his soul. Plato invited men to let their souls contemplate the realm of the eternal ideas; but no prophet, psalmist, apostle, or evangelist ever indicated that anything less than the totality of man's being is to be involved in the response of praise, joy, and thanksgiving to God. They knew that men in their entirety come forth from the hand of God, and that He desires that their "spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23)

Due response encompasses all we are, do, and have. The psalmist therefore invites God's children to rejoice (Ps. 58:10), to be glad (Ps. 47:1-4), to love (Ps. 31:23-24), to give thanks (Ps. 107), to fear (Ps. 8:6-8), to trust (Ps. 37:5), to hope (Ps. 33:22), to serve (Ps. 72:11). His spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5) is the place where we are to offer the spiritual sacrifices of our prayers (Ps. 141:2), thanks and praise (Ps. 50:14; 107:22), as well as of repentance (Ps. 51:19), of our goods (Heb. 13:15-16; cf. Prov. 3:9-10), and even of ourselves. (Rom. 12:1)

No movement of the heart or mind, no word of the mouth, no gesture of the body lies outside the realm of due response to God for His manifold acts of mercy. Because we are made in His image, He expects us to reflect His love, longsuffering, generosity, mercy, and grace in all we do and say, including our formulations of doctrine, even as Israel did in such credos as Deut. 6:4-5 (the *Shema*) and Deut. 26:5-10.

Any formulation of the doctrine of creation that we undertake must be drawn from the center of Scripture, from Christ Himself. Even as Israel looked back on creation from her election as God's people (Is. 43:1), so we need to respond to the Biblical teaching about

creation with the awareness that even before the world was made God chose us in Christ for redemption (Eph. 1:4). Furthermore, Holy Scripture tells us that it was through Christ that God created the world (John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2). This is a strong reminder to Christians that the doctrine of creation must be understood in relation to the Gospel, for that is how faith receives it. (1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 1:2-3)

Furthermore, Christians recognize the fact that the intention of God, as expressed in His original creative command for order, is and continues to be at work in the preservation of whatever measure of order there is in experienced reality. As Luther's explanation of the First Article suggests, our formulation of the doctrine of creation should not consist of an attempt to provide an explanation of an empirical understanding of the process of how things came to be, but should rather offer the assertion that the relationship of the world and of ourselves to God is that of creature to Creator. Our formulation also needs to include the observation that, by having called the world into being, God has also given it a purpose which is to be fulfilled between creation and the consummation of all things.

3. Response in Community

It is the God of Israel, both old and new, who created men for response. While, of course, every human being is peculiarly himself in whatever action he takes, the Scriptures would have us realize that a proper response comes from within the community of the redeemed.

The psalmist often employs the pronoun of the first person singular; yet what he composed under divine inspiration was written for Israel as a community at worship. The Book of Psalms was in fact the prayer book of the people who looked to the temple on Mount Zion as the center of their worship. One hundred and fifty psalms were selected to serve a cycle of three years in the worship services of synagog and temple. Even when he prayed them at home, the Israelite identified himself through the psalms with the rest of his people. The psalms taught him to say, "He is *our* God, and *we* are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand." (Ps. 95:7)

The God to whom the Israelite responded in worship and life was the One who had led this people through the Red Sea and made of it a royal priesthood, a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). And so He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Had God not acted to create a people, neither tabernacle nor temple would have been the place of His presence. Had this God not raised up Cyrus to be His anointed (Is. 45:1), the remnant could not have returned from Babylon. Any meaningful movement in worship had to include a rehearsal of these mighty acts of God so that coming generations might know the wonders He had wrought. (Ps. 78:4)

Israel knew this God as the Creator of heaven and earth from within this community experience. The assertion that God made the world arose not out of the laboratory observations of some individual scientist or group of researchers but as an item of response on the

part of a people at worship. God's action was exalted and proclaimed in the language of faith by a people which knew of its own election within history to the task of redemption.

What may well be Israel's earliest credo is found in the little liturgy of Deut. 26:5-10:

And you shall make response before the Lord your God, "A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage. Then he cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me." And you shall set it down before the Lord your God, and worship before the Lord your God.

The meaning disclosed by God in the history of this people is the meaning which He had originally intended for all mankind and which has been and is being realized in the lives of many who do not belong by race to God's ancient people. To speak of God as Creator, therefore, did not intend to offer some clue to philosophical speculations on the origin of life. Rather, it was and is a way of calling men to worship (Ps. 29; Ps. 104) on the basis of the meaning of man's history as living under God's grace and judgment. (Ps. 39:4-6; Ps. 46:1-3)

Both units of the creation story, as recorded in the early chapters of Scripture, relate the beginning of things to God's action of establishing His people. From Genesis 1 everything points toward the singling out of the holy community and God's revelation of the Law on Mount Sinai. From Gen. 2:4 forward all movement is directed to the moment of Abraham's choice in Genesis 12.

To be sure, Abraham built an altar to the Lord as a lonely stranger in a foreign land (Gen. 12:7), but he did so as a way of responding to God's promise of many descendants. He did not worship in isolation from the community that God had planned from eternity.

The thought of response in community carried over from Israel into the New Testament, as witness the example of John and Peter after their release from interrogation before the Jewish High Council. They went to their friends, we read, and rendered their report. The members of the group then lifted up their voices together to God and said: "Sovereign Lord, who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them . . . grant to Thy servants to speak Thy Word with all boldness . . ." (Cf. Acts 4:13-31)

The last glimpse we get of God's people acting in response is that of a great multitude, whose voice is like the sound of many waters and the sound of mighty thunderpeals. It is singing, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns" (Rev. 19:6). Until the time of consummation, the natural world is man's God-given habitat. Here he is invited to pray with all others who belong to God's family, "*Our* Father, who art in

heaven" (Matt. 6:9). And here he awaits the coming of new heavens and a new earth (2 Peter 3:13), predicted in such texts as Is. 65:17, and inaugurated in the work of Christ (2 Cor. 5:17) and the establishment of the church as the new Israel of God. (Gal. 6:16)

4. Response in Continuity

In Gen. 4:26 we are told that it was in the days of Seth that men began to call on the name of the Lord. That is to say, they responded in worship, invoking the God of all creation. God's children have been doing so ever since.

The Scriptures offer us the story of the way in which God arranged for His presence among men so that they might respond properly to Him. Before the tabernacle was built He came as a passing guest (cf. Genesis 18—19) and in theophanies (Exodus 24 and 33) and dreams (Gen. 20:3), as well as in His Word (cf. Exodus 20 and 34). With the selection of Israel as His very own, the people became the place of His presence in the sense that He revealed His grace to them particularly in their worship at tabernacle, temple, and synagogue.

In the age of the New Testament all these were replaced by the new sanctuary of God, the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17 and 2 Cor. 6:16b-18). There He has chosen to dwell in Word and Sacrament until such time as His people assemble in the new Jerusalem, where God Himself will be the temple. (Cf. Rev. 21:22)

In the meantime God's people respond to His gracious initiative by proclaiming His mighty deeds (1 Peter 2:9). In worship they bring to remembrance His great acts of deliverance and judgment as they recall the sequence of His saving interventions (cf. Ex. 15:1-18; Josh. 24:17; Eccl. 12:1) in keeping with the words from Job 36:24-28:

Remember to extol His work, of which men have sung. All men have looked on it; man beholds it from afar. Behold, God is great, and we know Him not; the number of His years is unsearchable. For He draws up the drops of water, He distills His mist in rain which the skies pour down and drop on man abundantly.

Accordingly, at matins we join Zechariah in the words of the Benedictus, and at vespers identify with Mary in the words of the Magnificat. For these canticles live on in the church and provide us with a sense of continuity as we respond properly to the words and works of that God who is above all gods.

Man can, of course, react improperly to God's overtures. The Scriptures tell us the story of His judgment on those who refuse to believe, on such as remain indifferent, on those who rebel against His grace. The response due God, therefore, includes the petition that we His children be spared the fury that is bound to overtake His enemies (cf. Ps. 7:6-8; 35:23-26). Hence it is imperative to realize that creation must be seen from the standpoint of our redemption. Without Christ, the Creator becomes a God to be afraid of.

5. Response in Particularity

There is only one true God. For a response to be proper, it must be directed toward that God who has revealed Himself especially in Jesus Christ. Any other

kind is idolatry, no matter how noble its form. In essence, this consists of inverting the Creator-creature relationship as described by the apostle Paul. (Rom. 1:23)

The prophet Hosea invites us to say to the Lord, "We will say no more, 'Our God' to the work of our hands" (Hos. 14:3). While we may not have in our culture such persons as say to a tree, "You are my father," and to a stone, "You gave me birth" (Jer. 2:27), there are other and more sophisticated ways of perverting the particularity of response.

The one true Lord is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is none beside Him. "Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life?" (Mal. 2:15). The prophet writes:

Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people upon it, and spirit to those who walk in it. . . . I am the Lord, that is My name; My glory I give to no other, nor My praise to graven images. (Is. 42:5, 8)

Due response is that particular in its focus, even though it occurs in solidarity with all that God made and in community and continuity with His people. So:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all ye lands! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into His presence with singing! Know that the Lord is God! It is He that made us, and we are His; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise! (Ps. 100:1-4)

VI. Summary Statements on the Biblical View of Creation

1. No study of what the Bible has to say on creation, or for that matter on any other subject, dare ignore the overall purpose of Holy Scripture as stated in 2 Tim. 3:15. There we are told that the Scriptures were given to instruct men for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This means that creation, too, must be understood in the light of the work and words of Jesus Christ, who wrought our salvation.

2. The Biblical teaching concerning creation depicts God as Creator and man as His creature. It testifies to the immeasurable distance between man and God.

3. The Biblical teaching that man is God's creature gives man his true worth. He does not exist as the result of an accident, nor is he the chance product of blind cosmic forces. He is in point of fact the deliberate creation of a wise, mighty, and loving God.

4. The Biblical teaching that God is the Creator and man is His creature places man under the jurisdiction of God and makes him accountable to Him in all things. Autonomous man is man in rebellion against his Creator.

5. The Biblical teaching that man is created in the image of God not only gives to each man his own individual worth but also reminds him that all other men have the same worth. Properly understood, therefore, the doctrine of creation is a powerful force for ethical behavior in the life of the individual and of society. Accordingly, this teaching is a powerful condemnation of racism and of all other forms of social injustice. It

serves as a constant reminder to Christians not only to respect their fellowmen as creatures of God (cf. Acts 17:26), but also to work for justice toward all men.

6. The fact that God placed Adam into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it serves as a powerful reminder to his descendants that they should not only fill the earth and subdue it, but that they should also cherish God's good earth and seek to preserve it as a fit habitation for all of God's creatures, particularly for man, who was chosen by God to exercise general dominion among His creatures.

7. Man fell into sin even though he was made to be the foremost among all of God's creatures on earth. This teaching should help us understand the human predicament and move us to humble ourselves in the sight of God and of our fellowmen. Above all, it should deepen our gratitude for the gracious redemption God offers us and all men in Christ Jesus.

8. The Biblical teaching of God's continued creation persuades men of every age and condition to regard themselves as creatures of a good, all-wise, and all-powerful Creator. At the same time it invites us to regard other men as God's creatures and to respect all of nature as His creation.

9. The Biblical teaching of God's continual care and preservation teaches men to trust God amid the vicissitudes of life and to ask and expect Him to provide for all their needs. This is a powerful antidote for human anxieties of every kind.

10. The Biblical teaching of God's government of His creation instructs men to obey Him in His commandments as their Creator and Lord, to whom they owe honor and obedience and to whom they are accountable at all times for their every thought, word, and deed.

11. The Biblical teaching on creation calls upon all men to acknowledge and glorify their Creator in unison with all creation, in community with all of God's children everywhere, and in the particularity of the Biblical revelation of God as the Creator and Redeemer of the world through His Son, Jesus Christ.

12. The Biblical doctrine of creation offers a true theology of hope for the individual believer, for the church, and for all of creation.

13. The Biblical teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption leaves no room for the notion of the development of the universe and of all that is in it from matter that is either eternal or autonomous or even self-generating. Holy Scripture teaches very plainly that our universe had a beginning, that it is finite, temporal, and perishable, and that it has been brought into being by the Word of the Creator Himself.

14. The Biblical teaching concerning creation does not rule out ongoing changes within the world of creatures. In fact, man's fall into sin produced great changes in creation, some of them sudden and others gradual. The efforts of individual men are constantly modifying the world of creatures including man himself. Such changes, however, do not represent any alteration in what the Lutheran Confessions would call the essential nature of the creatures in question. Moreover, the grace of God, which calls men to put their trust in Jesus Christ, through the activity of the Holy Spirit makes men new beings, changes their individual outlook and their life, and so works as a creative force for the renewal of men's relationships toward each other, toward society, and toward creation as a whole.

15. The language of the early chapters of Genesis is not "scientific" as we today understand "science." It offers a phenomenological description of reality. The literary forms and the language are such as to help men understand creation as God's act so that they may respond to their Creator with thanksgiving and humble service.

16. From the early chapters of Genesis the church has drawn those articles of faith which they are manifestly intended to teach, namely, God's creation of all things in perfection, the special creation of man in the image of God, the corruption of the creature world through sin, and the assurance of redemption in Jesus Christ. The church has wisely refrained, however, from establishing an official interpretation of every exegetical detail in these chapters.

17. As a matter of faithfulness to God's revelation and to the Gospel, the Christian church must hold fast and proclaim these fundamental teachings, not in isolation but in their organic whole as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures themselves.