

CALVIN VERSUS DARWIN: ANNIVERSARIES, ORIGINS AND WORLD-VIEWS¹ (4)

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Scripture, the Spectacles

We know all this about life in our world, not by examining the beaks of finches with Darwin or by speculating about uniform rates of erosion or deposition over millions of years with Lyell, but through the Holy Scriptures, which are inspired or God-breathed (II Tim. 3:16) and, therefore, inerrant and authoritative.²

Calvin rightly states that the divine authority of the sixty-six books of Holy Writ is established by the “inward testimony of the Spirit,” so that Scripture is “self-authenticated.”³ Our assurance that the Bible is God’s Word comes not merely from the church, never mind modern unbelieving science.⁴ Calvin’s teaching is comforting, profound and theocentric, honouring the work of God’s Spirit:

If we desire to provide in the best way for our consciences—that they may not be perpetually beset by the instability of doubt or vacillation, and that they may not also boggle at the smallest quibbles—we ought to seek our conviction [that God authored Holy Scripture] in a higher place than human reasons, judgments, or conjectures, that is, in the secret testimony of the Spirit.⁵

¹ This article is an expansion of a speech given in N. Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Wales and the United States in 2009. An audio (www.cprf.co.uk/audio.htm#special) and a video of the speech (www.youtube.com/user/CPRCNI#grid/user/07E1E2A78051B101), are available on-line. The CD or DVD (£1 each, inc. P&P) can be ordered from Mary Stewart (7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N Ireland BT42 3NR or 028 25 891851).

² *Belgic Confession 2* states that God’s Word “more clearly and fully” makes known God’s truth than that “most elegant book” of God’s “creation, preservation and government of the universe.”

³ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.4, p. 79; 1.7.5, p. 80.

⁴ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.1-3, pp. 74-78.

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes* 1.7.4, p. 78; cf. *Belgic Confession 5*; *Westminster Confession* 1:4-5. En-

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Since God's Word is also perspicuous and sufficient, we are able to arrive at a true and God-glorifying understanding of the origins of the universe, the earth, life and mankind, and, hence, a Christian and Reformed world-view.

Calvin is adamant: Scripture is not a "wax nose." Strikingly, Calvin makes this remark in the dedication of his commentary on Genesis to Henry, Duke of Vendome (1553–1610), who was to become King Henry IV of France (1589–1610). Calvin warns against "audacious scribblers" who "indulge in doubtful speculations" and "render Scripture flexible (so to speak) as a nose of wax."⁶ To apply this to contemporary issues, Scripture, especially Genesis, is not to be treated as a wax nose to be shaped or twisted (II Peter 3:16) in order to try to make it fit with an "old earth" and evolutionism. This is precisely what happens with theistic evolutionism, progressive creationism, the gap theory, the framework hypothesis and all the various modern compromises and corruptions of the biblical truth of creation.

Instead of being a "wax nose," Calvin presents the attractive image of Scripture as "spectacles" or "eyeglasses."⁷ According to John T. McNeill, the editor of the *Institutes*, the "spectacles" simile is "probably Calvin's decisive utterance on the role of Scripture as related to the revelation of the Creator

gelsma observes, "As much as any doctrine can be, the doctrine of the testimony of the Holy Spirit is original with Calvin. It is a marvellous contribution by Calvin to Christian theology" (*The Reformed Faith of John Calvin*, p. 71). This elevation of Scripture and the Holy Spirit is a mighty bulwark against false views of the relationship between God's Word and man's scientific theories, especially evolutionism.

⁶ Calvin, *Comm. on Gen.*, p. lii.

⁷ Calvin uses this image, e.g., near the start of his first sermon on Genesis, dealing with Genesis 1:1-2: "God extends to us a wonderful kindness, greatly pleased to help us in our ignorance, in our reluctance, indeed in our wickedness, by adding his word to what we can see and perceive by experience. Consequently, we can call God's word our eyeglasses. Those who are near-sighted or whose eyesight is dim see some light, but if they wish to see at a distance, everything will be blurred and they will not be able to tell the difference between one letter and another. But if they have glasses, their eyesight is so strengthened as to be restored, whereas it was previously useless to them. The same is true when we try to judge the works of God with our own senses. We move toward irrationality. We will lack circumspection and discrimination, but when our Lord provides his word, we are able to see distinctly and to be instructed in what is necessary for worshipping and serving him and attributing to him the glory which is his" (*Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, pp. 4-5; cf. *Comm. on Gen.*, pp. 62-63; *Institutes* 1.6.1, p. 70; 1.14.1, p. 160).

in creation.”⁸ Without the Word of God, we do not see the created order or ourselves or the Most High correctly because of our sin. At best, our vision is blurred and indistinct. We are like blind men stumbling around an unknown room. But when the believer puts on the spectacles of Scripture and by faith views all things through these glasses, he understands God, himself and the world. The oracles of God interpret the works of God, as T. H. L. Parker puts it: “the *oracula Dei* (as Calvin was fond of calling the Scriptures) are necessary to the understanding of the *opera Dei*.”⁹

This is a key point against those who believe that if Calvin were alive today (and were aware of contemporary evolutionary scholarship), he would not hold to a literal six-day creation and a young earth. Joseph A. Pipa Jr. explains,

... contrary to modern assumptions, he [i.e., Calvin] never placed general revelation on a par with special revelation. Calvin clearly asserts that we can understand natural revelation only by the spectacles of Scripture and that creation can only be properly understood by the believer. Scripture, in fact, corrects the observation of nature.¹⁰

The bespectacled believer knows that “the things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Heb. 11:3).¹¹ There was no eternal, pre-existent matter that exploded billions of years ago; life did not evolve from a primeval pond. From the creation week of Genesis 1, we learn that God “spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9). This explains the origin of man and his universe.

⁸ *Institutes*, p. 70, n. 1. Robert L. Reymond notes that near the beginning of *Institutes* 1.6, Calvin’s first chapter on God’s Word, he “employs three metaphors” for Scripture as necessary to bring us to a true knowledge of God. As well as (1) “spectacles,” God’s word is also (2) a “thread” to bring us out of the “inexplicable labyrinth” of idolatrous thoughts (1.6.3, p. 73) and (3) a “teacher” (cf. 1.6.2, p. 72; 1.6.4, p. 73) (“Calvin’s Doctrine of Holy Scripture (1.6-10),” in David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (eds.), *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008], pp. 46-47).

⁹ Parker, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p. 39

¹⁰ Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “Creation and Providence (1.14, 16-18),” in Hall and Lillback (eds.), *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, p. 137.

¹¹ Calvin frequently cites Hebrews 11:3 to prove the essential role of faith in knowing the truth of creation and the creator (e.g., *Institutes* 1.5.14, p. 68; 1.16.1, p. 197; Comms. on Gen., p. 63; Heb. 11:3; *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1-11*, p. 7).

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But what do the world and the false churches do? The world takes evolution as its spectacles and puts them on in order to interpret the cosmos and create its own naturalistic world-view. The false churches throw away the glasses God gave them as worthless and put on evolutionary spectacles to view the created order. Then, still wearing evolutionary glasses, they seek to reinterpret God's Word! More "cognitive dissonance" ensues, for the Bible and evolutionism do not fit and are antithetical. So evolutionary theologians dream up, and members of liberal churches embrace, the various contradictory compromise theories. It is time for confessing Christians to cast all the evolutionary spectacles into the bin and put on the glasses God Himself gave us.

Believing that Scripture alone is the spectacles through which we and our children must interpret all things, it is no surprise that John Calvin is especially strong not only on the faithful teaching ministry of the church but also on the education of Christian youth, both boys and girls, in primary schools, high schools and universities.¹² The church and the home and the school must all teach the one truth of God in Jesus Christ. Christian children must not be given different glasses at school from the one they are given in church and at home. This would confuse them and damage their eyes, giving them double vision. Calvin is an advocate of the biblical and Reformed world-view, and this world-view must be consistent and it must be passed on. This is the way in which God realises His covenant with us and our seed (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 4:9-10; 6:6-7).

Interpreting all things through God's Word, our only spectacles, and rejecting the dominant anti-Christian philosophy in the Western world will neces-

¹² Georgia Harkness, not the most trustworthy of Calvin authors, is, at least, correct in this: John Calvin "was a keen thinker, a highly educated man, a scholar of towering intellectual capacity. He believed in education, and he set before his followers the requirement of both an educated ministry and an educated laity. He founded a university for the better education of the people and the training of young men for the ministry. He insisted that children be given free, compulsory education. He set the example for the high regard for education which led the Puritans to establish Harvard College in 1636, almost as soon as their feet had touched New England soil" (*John Calvin: The Man and His Ethics* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1931], p. 87). Calvin's sterling promotion of education has been inspirational for almost five centuries in the founding and continuing of Christian schools, colleges and universities around the world and not only in New England.

sarily bring suffering. Leading evolutionists advocate a one-world government, a government whose whole philosophy is evolutionary and anti-Christian. In so doing, they are preparing the way for Antichrist and his kingdom, which, in turn, will intensify the persecution and suffering of Christ's church. Calvin speaks often and powerfully of suffering, more so than any of the Reformers, except perhaps Luther.¹³

What must we do? Witness, spread the truth and suffer. Lay down your life; die for the truth of Jesus Christ, if needs be. "In your patience possess ye your souls" (Luke 21:19). Calvin is not teaching evolution's "survival of the fittest," but the Reformed faith's "perseverance of the saints," pressing on, despite oppression and suffering, in holiness and submission to Christ's truth.

Calvin Versus Darwin in Society and Church

The relative influence of Darwin and evolutionism on the one hand and Calvin and Reformed Christianity on the other explains much that is going on in the Western world today. Evolutionism stands behind and supports humanism. This influences education, civil government, popular culture and society. Political correctness is promoted (and increasingly enforced). Christianity is being forced out of the public sphere (and increasingly criminalised).

You can see this happening among the nations. In the Western world, America is the most Christian and conservative, but this is being eroded, especially under the administration of President Barack Obama. The Republic of Ireland and the UK are further to the left. Canada, Germany, France and Sweden are even more evolutionary and secular. No wonder "meaninglessness" has been identified as the malaise of modern, liberal Europe, for its dominant world-view, evolutionism, has no purpose, being all about time and chance.¹⁴

¹³ Setting forth the teaching of the Genevan Reformer, Ronald S. Wallace states, "The members of the body of Christ who are sanctified through union with Christ are subjected to a special providence which shapes their historical career into a pattern similar to the pattern of death and resurrection worked out in the sanctification of Jesus Christ Himself. The afflictions which are ordered by God for this purpose Calvin calls the Cross" (*Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life* [Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959], p. 68).

¹⁴ Cf. Dawkins: "The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless

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What about the churches—their seminaries, their preaching and their day schools? The Church of England in 2009, this anniversary year, apologised to Darwin. Roman Catholicism marked the 150th anniversary of the publication of the *Origin of Species*, by staging a five-day conference held in Rome (March, 2009), at which theistic evolutionism was advocated and “Intelligent Design” (never mind biblical creation in six days!) was rejected.

The various compromises mentioned earlier—theistic evolution, progressive creation, the gap theory, the framework hypothesis, etc.—infect liberal and nominally evangelical churches. None of them are, of course, satisfactory, and none of them are stable.

Evolutionism, the Universal Theological Solvent

The theory and world-view of evolutionism, promoted by state and school and in society and church, dissolves Christian doctrine. This is the invariable result, especially given time, for principles work through. Especially, but by no means exclusively, Genesis 1-3 must be “reinterpreted.” Evolutionism tells us that the creation of the universe and life and man in six days is wrong. There is no devil and there are no fallen angels. There was no serpent at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is no fall, no original sin, no total depravity. Death is not God’s punishment for sin.

Since there is no first Adam, there is no second or “last Adam,” Jesus Christ (I Cor. 15:45). Given that there was no tree in the Garden of Eden, then there is no tree at Calvary and no redemption in the cross. If there is no first coming of Christ 2,000 years ago, there will be no second coming of Christ at the end of the world. All this, of course, is a sign of divine judgment, for, as Calvin points out, “the first proof of [God’s] condemnation” is rejection of His revelation of Himself in creation and refusal to worship Him. This reveals man’s “sacrilege” and “wicked and abominable ingratitude.”¹⁵

As evolutionary theory dissolves Christian doctrine, Christian ethics also corrode. We shall consider just two examples. According to God’s Word and its teaching on creation, marriage is between one man and one woman for

indifference” (*River Out of Eden*, p. 133).

¹⁵ Calvin, Comm. on Rom. 1:18.

life (Gen. 2:24).¹⁶ Attacking creation, evolutionism necessarily undermines the biblical truth of marriage, and thus facilitates or paves the way for or serves to justify fornication, adultery, divorce, remarriage while one's spouse is living and even sodomy. Romans 1:26-27 presents the last abomination as divine judgment upon the denial of God as creator.

Evolutionism also dissolves Christian teaching on the Lord's Day; it attacks not just the seventh commandment but also the fourth commandment.¹⁷ If there was no creation week, there is no Sabbath day's rest, one day in seven for the private and public worship of God. Then there is no need to go to church to praise the Lord, hear His Word and use the sacraments. All this and much more is the necessary result of evolutionism and, for the consistent secularists, it is their stated purpose.

Evolutionism, the universal theological solvent, has been dissolving biblical doctrine and ethics for the last 150 years. That is the history, all around the world, and it is going on today before our eyes.

These are the two poles: Calvin and Darwin, biblical creationism and atheistic evolutionism. Where do you stand?

The first line of the *Apostles' Creed* states, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth"—as set forth in the Bible. Receiving this truth, then and only then can you believe the rest of the *Apostles' Creed* and the whole of biblical and Reformed Christianity. We, our children and our churches must treasure, develop, promote and suffer for all the glorious truth of God's Word. God uses this testimony for the gathering and edification of the elect church of Christ, who is returning to make all things new!

¹⁶ For more on marriage, see this on-line Marriage Resources page (www.cprf.co.uk/marriageresources.htm).

¹⁷ For more on the Lord's Day, see this on-line Lord's Day Resources page (www.cprf.co.uk/lordsdayresources.htm).