

Exegesis Of Genesis One And Two

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INTRODUCTION.

The catalog of our seminary in Mequon informs us that two class periods a week for twelve weeks are devoted to a study of the first four chapters of Genesis. I am sure that President Lawrenz, who teaches the course, would agree that even in these twelve weeks not everything that might be said about these four chapters can possibly be considered. It will therefore be obvious that the topic which we have before us today, the interpretation of the first two chapters of Genesis, cannot be adequately dealt with in the time allotted to it at this convention. We shall therefore limit ourselves to the discussion of a few questions concerning these two chapters which are of particular significance in our time.

THE DAYS OF GENESIS ONE.

Obviously, when we study these first two chapters of the Bible, which tell us God's own story of the creation of the world and the origin of species, the very first question that confronts us in the modern world is how these two chapters can be reconciled with the almost universally accepted dogma of evolution.

A few decades ago, some efforts were made in Lutheran circles to reconcile the two views by contending that the six days of Genesis One could be interpreted as six long periods of time. In this way, it was felt, one could find the billions of years which are necessary for the present world to come into existence by the long and slow processes of evolution. As we shall see, even if this interpretation of the word "day" were possible, we would still be a long, long way from having found a way for the Biblical doctrine of creation and the pseudo-scientific dogma of evolution to coexist peacefully.

If we are to follow the basic rule of Bible interpretation, namely, that the Scripture must interpret itself, the days of Genesis One cannot in any case be understood as being long periods of time. The meaning of a word is determined by usage and by the context in which it is used. A sound may have a number of meanings. For example, the sound of "be" could denote the second letter of the alphabet, or it could stand for a gathering for work, or a contest, or an insect, or it could serve as a verb or as a short form of the name "Beatrice." Yet no one would have any difficulty whatever in understanding the sentence: "*Bea* and Harold, who is a beekeeper, were engaged after the spelling *bee*, and because whoever has said "A" must also say "B", they will *be* married after the quilting *bee* next week." In that sentence, the sound "be" is used with six different meanings, some of which have absolutely no connection with each other, but every time it is used the words with which it is used make clear exactly what is meant in each case. This is what we mean when we say that the meaning of a word must be determined by its context.

Now it is true that the word "day" does not always mean the same thing, and at times it denotes a rather indefinite period of time. When we say, for example, that a certain word was used in Shakespeare's day, the word "day" in that context means the period of time when Shakespeare was writing his plays. Or if we tell our sons and daughters that in our day we did

not act the way they do, we mean by "our day" the time when we were young and growing up. Jesus used the word "day" in that way when He told the Jews, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad," and it is used similarly in the second chapter of Genesis, which speaks of the "day" in which God made the earth and the heavens. But even in these cases the period of time denoted by the word "day" is definitely limited. I do not know of any case in which the word is used to denote a period which is billions or millions or even thousands of years in length.

Several Bible passages, which are used in an effort to prove that a day can in Biblical usage be a very long period of time, establish the very opposite. When St. Peter writes, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day," that passage does not by any means give us leave to say that a day can be a thousand years long. To see how ridiculous such a conclusion is, one needs only to substitute the phrase "a long period of time," for the word "day" in this passage and read. "A long period of time is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as a long period of time." The whole point of the passage is this that since God is eternal, therefore with Him a day, that is, a period of time that seems short to us, is as a thousand years, that is, a period of time that seems long to us. The same thing must be said about the words of Moses, "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past."

Even if this were not so, in the first chapter of Genesis the context is so clear and so definite that there can be no question about the exact meaning of the word. We are told that "God divided the light from the darkness; and God called the light Day and the darkness He called Night." It does not take a great deal of scholarship to see that the word "day" in this context denotes a period of light which is separated from a period of darkness; and that these periods of light and darkness followed each other in orderly fashion from the very beginning is indicated by the very next sentence, which says, "And the evening and the morning were the first day."

This statement also tells us that the days of which Genesis One speaks have an evening and a morning. In this case the word day denotes the period of light together with the period of darkness. This is a very common figure of speech in which the name of a part of something is used as a name for the whole thing. We use this figure of speech when we say that our congregations consist of a certain number of souls. We call them souls and yet we mean people, souls joined with bodies. The word "body" is used in exactly the same way, as everybody knows.

Additional evidence to support the natural meaning of the word "day" is found in verses 14 to 18, where we read, "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years; and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth; and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness; and God saw that it was good."

We are told, therefore, that these lights, which divided the day from the night, were to be for seasons and for days and years. If in this series, days are understood to be billions of years, then what is meant by seasons and by years? In this connection, it is interesting to note that sometimes the same men who want to lengthen the days of Genesis One, because they find it hard to believe that God created the whole world in six short days, have a tendency to shorten the years of Genesis Five, where we are told that the patriarchs before the Flood lived for hundreds of years, because they find it hard to believe that men could live so long. Additional light is shed on the whole concept of time measurement in Genesis Seven and Eight where we

have a rather detailed calendar of the Flood, which indicates rather definitely that in the language of Moses a year consisted of twelve months of approximately thirty days each. When Moses says that the Flood began in the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, it ought to be obvious to anyone that Moses used the words "day, " "month, " and "year" in their normal meaning.

In the section of Genesis One, just cited, we were also told that a greater light was made to rule the day, and a lesser light was made to rule the night. This can only be the sun and the moon, and the word "day" again must be understood to be the period of time during which the sun shines. Thus we are again driven to conclude that the six days in which God created all things were days of ordinary length as we know them.

There are some questions, of course, that we cannot answer and concerning which we ought not to be too dogmatic. Some men will ask, "Since the sun was not created until the fourth day, how can we be sure that the first three days were not billions of years in length?" Before we answer that question, it would be well to remember that if the fourth, fifth, and sixth days were days of ordinary length, then there is no room for evolution since all animals and men were created on the fifth and sixth days. Since the theory of evolution is the only reason for lengthening the days, there would be no occasion left for assuming that the first three days were infinitely long periods. Moreover, all six days are described in the same way: "The evening and the morning were the first day, " and "the evening and the morning were the sixth day." Since they are all described in the same there would seem to be no reason to assume that any of them were any longer than the others.

Besides this, if the days are made over into long periods of light, then it would seem that the nights which follow those days should also be long periods of darkness. We had a dramatic demonstration of what this would mean just a few weeks ago when *Surveyor I* was sent to take pictures of the moon. On the moon two weeks of sunlight are followed by two weeks of darkness. During the two weeks of sunlight, the temperature rises to some two hundred degrees above zero, and during the two weeks of darkness the temperature drops to some two hundred degrees below zero. It is not difficult to imagine what would have happened to the plants that were created on the third day if that day was billions of years long and was followed by a night of at least comparable length, just because the sun had not yet been created.

But questions like this need not detain us for long since there are far more powerful arguments against evolution in these two chapters than the statement that the world was created in six days. The dogma of evolution not only contradicts the Biblical doctrine that the world and all the creatures in it were made in a very short period of time, but at almost every major point of Christian theology alluded to in these chapters evolution stands in diametric opposition to the Biblical view.

EVOLUTION DESTROYS THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF MAN.

According to Genesis One and Two, man is a special creature of God, distinct from the rest of the animal world. The various species or kinds of birds and fish and animals are created in groups by a divine decree, but in many different ways these two chapters make it plain that when God created man He was making a creature different from all the rest, a creature who was to be an object of God's special interest and concern. The creation of man is preceded by a special consultation of the Holy Trinity. Man is created in the image of God. He is given dominion over all the other creatures. We are specifically told among all the animals there was found not one

that was fit to be Adam's companion and helper. Man is the only creature from whom God expects intelligent and conscious obedience. From the very beginning man is a moral creature, to whom the standards of right and wrong and good and evil apply. From the very beginning, too, man is able to speak, for Genesis Two tells us that man gave names to all the animals which were brought to him. From the very beginning man is able to use language and thus is able to understand God when He speaks to him, and he in turn can speak to God.

How different is this Biblical portrait of man from that which is presented to us in modern evolutionary anthropology. There men are nothing more than beasts, differing in degree, perhaps, but not in kind from all the rest of the animal world, uniformly low in intelligence, living for tens of thousands of years in the branches of trees or in caves, communicating with each other only in grunts and cries, unskilled in language, knowing nothing of God or of religion or right and wrong for millennia. Where is there room for the image of God in that picture? So radically different are these two views of man that evolutionists sometimes make the charge that the Biblical view tends to foster a spirit of pride in man by causing him to forget his humble origin. We shall not dignify that charge with an answer.

Moreover, according to the evolutionary view of man and his beginnings, there never could have been two actual people called Adam and Eve. There can only be large number of animals gradually becoming more and more human. The whole idea of a single pair from whom all men are descended is foreign to the evolutionary doctrine concerning the development of the human race. If evolution is accepted, the whole picture of man as we find it in these first two chapters of Genesis will need to be revised.

ORIGINAL SIN

The Scriptural teaching of the unity of the human race and its descent from a common ancestor becomes especially important when we discuss the doctrine of original sin, which is also incompatible with evolution. According to St. Paul, we have all inherited original depravity and guilt from Adam. By one man sin entered into the world, he says. In the Biblical presentation the world is without sin in the beginning. We are told repeatedly in Genesis One that everything that God had made was very good. This is said also after the creation of man. In Genesis Two we are taught very clearly that man was a moral creature from the beginning, and that God expected man to keep His commandments. Moreover, the image of God consisted in righteousness and holiness.

According to evolution, however, men were once beasts swinging by their tails in the trees. To bite, to fight, to kill, and to steal from each other was their very nature. The tendency toward evil is something we brought with us out of the jungle. Men today are a thousand times better than they were a hundred thousand years ago, and a hundred thousand years from now they will be a thousand times better than they are today. "We have come a long way since we were swinging by our tails from the trees," said an evolutionary theologian some years ago, "But we still have about as far to go as we have already come." Only one thing seems to worry the men who hold this view. They are afraid that man's moral and ethical development is not keeping pace with his scientific and technological progress.

In evolutionary philosophy, therefore, original sin is only the remnant of the beast in us for which we can hardly be held responsible. The concept of one ancestor of the whole human race, who fell into sin, and whose consequent depravity and guilt were passed on to all his descendants who are born in the natural way must also be surrendered, if the evolutionary view

of man and creation is accepted. So it has come to pass that Lutherans who have adopted evolution are also teaching that the word "Adam" in Genesis One and Two does not denote an individual but is a name for the whole human race, for mankind.

The Biblical doctrine of the Fall also cannot stand side by side with the dogma of evolution. In the first chapters of the Bible man stands before us as a good creature, created in the image of God and sinless. This holy creature fell into sin by disobeying the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and in this way he fell into a sinful state of depravity and corruption. But what shall we make of the Fall if man is only an animal gradually evolving into a moral creature? There is no holy estate from which he can fall into sin, for, as we have already observed, the tendency toward evil has always been there and is gradually being bred out of him, just as undesirable characteristics are bred out of cattle on the farm. If the evolutionary view of man is correct, then the Fall can only be a step upward. The story of the Fall of Man as we have it in Genesis can then only be a mythical echo of the time when man-like beasts discovered a sense of guilt. That was the era when man finally became a moral creature, the day when he stopped doing evil without regard for the consequences, the time when he began to feel responsible for his actions. What is described for us, then, in Genesis Three should no longer be spoken of as a fall but as one of the greatest forward strides in the whole history of the human race, and it is certain that St. Paul's statement in Romans Five, that "By one man sin entered into the world," will have to be given up as only a rabbinical misunderstanding of the Old Testament.

Not only does the evolutionary philosophy destroy the Biblical view of the Fall and original sin, but it also vitiates the whole Biblical doctrine of actual sin. In Genesis Two we are told that God gave man a very definite command, "Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it." It is this command that man violated and thus became guilty of an actual sin. According to Genesis Two, in is the violation of a command of God and guilt is the state of being liable to punishment, in this case, death, as a result of this violation of God's law.

In the evolutionary view of law and sin and guilt, there is no such thing as absolute commands that come to us by direct revelation from God. Laws are rather rules of conduct that are developed by experience. As animals in the jungle developed low-grade human intelligence, they began to realize that certain types of behavior are not good. They learned by bitter experience that certain actions were likely to bring reprisal. If you bit another animal, you would be bitten in return, and from the scars that developed as a result of a dozen such experiences even a savage and primitive creature would soon learn that it is a good idea not to bite others, and out of this grew the command, "Thou shalt not bite," which, in turn, became the basis of "Thou shalt not kill." Lutheran theologians may call such discoveries and insights that come out of experience and meditation by the name of revelation, but in this case the word is only part of the sheep's clothing that is used to cover up the heresy.

Out of this evolutionary concept of the origin of law, a concept which has influenced and undermined our whole modern way of living and thinking, has grown the pragmatic principle that the good action is that action which has good results. From this it is a very short step to the idea that the law is the will of the people, which can only mean in plain language that what the people want is right. This has been the philosophy which has guided the decisions of the United State Supreme Court ever since the days of Oliver Wendell Holmes. And when churchmen adopt this evolutionary philosophy, is it any wonder that we begin to hear also in the church that all morals are relative, that there are no absolute standards of right and wrong? Under these conditions should we really be surprised when a pastor of a Lutheran Synod, whose officials still

claim to be conservative, writes in a booklet published earlier this year, that guilt is "any act or attitude which does not contribute to the overall enjoyment of life by people. Actual guilt, real religious guilt, is any failure to celebrate life with the Creator of all life and His creatures." (Paul Malte, *Celebrating Deep*, St. Louis, LLL, 1966, p. 5)

How far removed such views are from the teaching of the Bible ought to be evident when we read the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The first command that is given to man has nothing to do with biting and scratching and pulling hair. It is a command not to eat the fruit of a certain tree. It is not a command that grows out of human experience. It is true, of course, that Adam and Eve learned by experience that the eating was bad, but by this time it was already too late. The whole story clearly proclaims that the eating is bad not because it has bad results, but because it violates the revealed will of God. In my younger years, I used to wonder occasionally why God chose something so insignificant as eating from a tree as the testing ground for Adam and Eve. Modern, sophisticated theology wrestles with that problem also and comes up with the answer that the eating of the forbidden fruit is only a symbol for sex experience, and then they discover an artificial conflict between Genesis One and Two, for in Genesis One we are told that God created man male and female and then gave them the command to be fruitful and multiply, which implies that sex is a divine creation and that the sexual relationship in marriage is God-pleasing, whereas in Genesis Two the sexual relationship under the symbolism of forbidden fruit is depicted as sinful. On evidence as flimsy as this they come to the conclusion that Genesis One and Two were written by two different authors and deny the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. How much more profitable it would be if men would just take those Biblical records at face value, and then learn from them that sin basically is a violation of a command given by God Himself, or, in the words of the Bible, that sin is "the transgression of the law."

We do not at this time have the opportunity to consider all the ramifications of the conflict between the Christian view of the law and sin and guilt, on the one hand, and the philosophy of evolution on the other, but it might be well if someday a Christian lawyer with a solid knowledge of Biblical doctrine would make a study of this subject. The argument that Clarence Darrow used to use on his juries, namely, that the defendants, though guilty, were not responsible for their crimes, the doctrine of Alcoholics Anonymous that alcoholism is not a sin but a disease, the theory of many modern penologists that the purpose of our whole penal system is not to punish but to reform, the argument of some of our modern theologians and psychologists that homosexuality should not be considered a crime or a sin, all of these would be interesting items of evidence to consider in this study. Thirty years ago a leading evolutionist wrote, "On the whole, the dissemination of evolutionary teaching among the lower grades of human intelligence,---in short, to the public at large,-- may be inexpedient. An inept presentation of evolution to persons of limited mentality is likely to destroy their religious beliefs and fears, and to free them from inhibitions which make them socially tolerable." (A. E. Hooton, *Apes, Men, and Morons*, New York, Putnam and Sons, 1937, p. 7). This whole question has a bearing also on the widespread lawlessness and delinquency of our time. For three generations our public schools have been teaching our children that they are the descendants of animals. We ought not to be surprised when they begin to act like animals.

But to proceed with the subject at hand--we can say also that evolution is not only incompatible with the Christian view of law and of sin and of guilt, but it also contradicts the Christian doctrine of death. According to Genesis Two, God threatened Adam and Eve with

death as a punishment for eating of the forbidden fruit, and St. Paul tells us in Romans, that death came into the world as a result of the sin of Adam.

But if the evolutionary view of man is correct, then man does not die because he is a sinner, neither does death enter the world as a result of Adam's sin. In the theory of evolution, the very rocks contain a record of death which antedates mankind by millions of years. Moreover, in that theory death is not an evil that comes into the world as a result of sin, but it is the basic tool of evolution. The whole process of evolution could not function without wholesale death. The very term "the survival of the fittest" testifies to this. When the human race, therefore, appeared in its most primitive form, it was only natural for those savage and uncivilized creatures to die, for they were descended from creatures which had always died. One can only conclude, then, that there is no real connection between the death of man and his sin.

But if this is true, then what is the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ? The Bible says that as by one man's disobedience, sin and death came into the world, so by the obedience of one man, Jesus Christ, righteousness and life have been restored to men. If death is not the wages of sin, then what possible connection can there be between the death of the Son of God and our offenses, and how can His death pay the penalty of the guilt of the whole world? It is surely no accident that Lutherans who have made peace with evolution are also beginning to speak of salvation for men apart from faith in Christ, and it is safe to predict that where evolution is accepted, the doctrine of the vicarious atonement will also be denied. Lutheran theologians who believe that evolution "can be expounded in such a manner that Law and Gospel are not mitigated or obscured" (Milton Rudnick, quoted in *Lutheran News*, IV, 1 (July 11, 1966), p. 12) either do not understand Law and Gospel, or they do not understand evolution. Also here we might say that it is amazing what men will believe so long as it is not in the Bible.

But someone may ask how we are to account for the scientific evidence which seems to indicate that the earth is millions of years old. Here, too, a believing acceptance of Genesis One and Two will give us at least a clue to the solution of the problem, even though it may not answer in detail every question that men may ask. If a twentieth century scientist would be transported back in time to the garden of Eden on the evening of the sixth day of creation, he would have found a fertile garden, with full-grown animals wandering among fruit-bearing trees, and he would have met two adult human beings. From the scientific point of view, who would fault him for concluding that this garden must have been here for some years. On the basis of his observations, he might well have concluded that Adam and Eve had been living in this garden for several decades. So far as scientific evidence goes, he would have been justified in saying that these fruit trees must have been planted at least several years before the day of his visit, and if he had chopped down one of those trees to count the rings, he might very well have concluded that this garden had been in existence for hundreds of years. If he would have measured the depth of the soil in the garden he might have assumed that, if this soil had been formed from bare rock at the same rate at which soil is formed under similar conditions today, this garden must have been in existence for thousands of years. And if he had looked into the sky, to see there the same stars which we see today, he would have concluded that, since some of these stars are millions of light years away from the earth, this earth and these stars must be millions of years old. But every one of his opinions would have been an unwarranted assumption, and every single conclusion to which he would have come would have been wrong. Those stars had come into existence just about forty-eight hours before, created "to give light upon the earth," as Genesis One tells us, and therefore created with a beam of light reaching back billions upon quadrillions of miles; that soil had been laid down just three days before and the trees had come into

existence bearing fruit just a few moments after the soil had risen out of the seas; the bird which he saw flying in the heavens had not hatched from eggs after weeks of incubation nor had they spent additional weeks in the nest growing feathers under the care of their parents, but they had fluttered full-grown from the hand of God little more than twenty-four hours before; and those two married people who could speak so intelligently about the animals in the garden (for this is implied when we are told that Adam gave names to all the cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field) were both less than twelve hours old. The point that ought to be clear to all of us is that, entirely aside from the theory of evolution, we are taught by the Biblical revelation of creation to expect to find a world that seems to be much older than it really is. If scientists would be truly scientific and say that the universe seems to be millions of years old, or even that it is millions of years old unless at some time in the past the whole natural world came into being in a supernatural, miraculous way, or that some catastrophic event or events speeded up certain processes of nature at one time or another, we would have no reason to quarrel with them; in fact, we would agree and say that the earth appears to be far more ancient than it is, and we know that it is much younger than it seems to be only because God, who is the only one who really knows how all things came to be, has shared this secret with us in Genesis One and Two. Keil-Delitzsch has said it very well: "Creation is an act of a personal God, not a process of nature, the development of which can be traced to the laws of birth and decay that prevail in the created world" (Pentateuch, I, p. 41).

THE MYTHOLOGICAL, INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS ONE AND TWO

In recent years, however, an entirely new approach to these early chapters of Genesis has begun to make itself evident also in the Lutheran Church, and this new theology is a thousand times more dangerous than the old attempts to bring Genesis into line with the theories of Darwin and Laplace, by interpreting a few words in a loose and unjustified way. In large areas of modern Lutheranism, the stories of Creation and the fall, of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, of the Flood and the Tower of Babel are treated as myths of a primitive age which we must learn to outgrow, or which we must at least learn to understand lest we, by accepting these accounts as historical records, make ourselves and the Christian religion ridiculous in the eyes of modern, educated, and sophisticated men.

So it comes about that one hears again and again that Genesis One and Two were not intended to give us a record of how God created the world, but they are meant only to teach us that God created the world, even though His method of creating may have been a gradual, long-drawn-out evolutionary process. A Lutheran folksinger, who has been received with acclaim also in Lutheran Synods that loudly proclaim themselves to be conservative, tells us that on this matter of the historicity of Genesis One and Two we must prepare to "abandon ship," and in regard to the creation of the world he sings, "My faith is built on who not how."

Of folksingers we might expect that they would be "far-out", but, tragically, the theologians of the Lutheran Church are beginning to tell us that God, in Genesis One and Two, did not intend to tell us how He created the world, but that the only thing that we are supposed to learn from these chapters is that God is the creator of all things and all that this implies. Thus we hear the president of a large Lutheran seminary say, "It is our conviction that no theologian, speaking as theologian, is competent to pass judgment on any particular theory of the modality of creation." In plain English that means that no theologian has a right to say whether God really created the world in six days or whether He created it by evolution in billions of years.

But we might ask these modern deniers of the teaching of the Bible two questions. The first is this "If God did not intend to tell us how He created the world, why did He?" Genesis One and Two tell us a great deal about the modality of creation. If men tell us that these chapters, however, leave many questions unanswered, they ought to admit, first, that the theory of evolution also leaves as many or more questions unanswered, and secondly, that where the Bible has given us answers Christian theologians ought to consider the matter a closed issue in which there is no room for the theories and guesswork of men. If God did not want to tell us anything about the manner in which He made the universe, then why did He not simply have a Moses rite, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," and let it go at that.

The second question we might ask these men is, "How do you know that God did not intend to tell us how He created the world?" Did He tell you this in the visions of the night? Did you dream it? Did He tell you this in such plain unmistakable words as we find in Genesis One? Or did you just come to this conclusion because you were ashamed to stand before the world and say that you believe what the Bible says about creation?"

Whenever this whole question is discussed, it usually does not take long before someone says, "After all, what difference does it make? We are not saved by believing that God created the world in a certain way but by believing that Jesus died for our sins. Why could God not have created the world in millions of years if He wanted to?" We will gladly grant that God could have done it this way if it had pleased Him to do so, but it is not a question of what God can do or can't do, but rather a question of what He did and of whether we should now believe that He did what He told us He did.

And it is also a question of how we are going to read our Bible. If men are to be free to say that the story of creation is a myth, then what will prevent them from saying that the story of the virgin birth is a myth, that the account of the resurrection of Christ is a myth, that the story of the ascension is myth, that the prophecy concerning the second coming of Christ is a myth. All of these things are being said in the Christian Church and also in the Lutheran Church, today. Find a church that will tolerate theologians who deny the historical accuracy of Genesis One and Two, and you will also usually find a church which will tolerate men who question the historical correctness of the accounts of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

In the Middle Ages it was fashionable in theological circles to treat the histories of the Bible as allegories. Everything stood for something else. Eve was a symbol of the lower nature of man. Adam stood for man's reason, the stars of Genesis One really meant the angels, and the seven nations that Israel drove out of Canaan were the seven deadly sins. It was no wonder that they came to the conclusion that the Bible was an obscure book. If the words did not mean what they said, then what did they mean? The answer was anybody's guess.

Into this exegetical climate came Martin Luther with his assertion that "the natural speech shall be the Kaiser's wife," that is, that the meaning of the Bible was to be found in the words of the Bible, or that the Bible just meant what it said. In his commentary on Genesis he said that Moses' "purpose is to teach us, not about allegorical creatures and an allegorical world, but about real creatures and a visible world apprehended by the senses...He employs the terms 'day' and 'evening' without allegory." (LW, I, 5) Commenting on Origen's view that the trees in the garden of Eden were angels and the rivers were a symbol for wisdom, Luther said, "Such twaddle is unworthy of theologians. . . Origen does not take into consideration that Moses is writing a history." (LW, I, 9) In his comments on the fall of man he wrote, "I adhere simply to the historical and literal meaning, which is in harmony with the text. In accordance with this meaning, the serpent remain a serpent.... the woman remains a woman; Adam remains Adam."

Only if we approach the Bible in the same way can we know with certainty what the Lord wishes to say to us in this book.

We are often told that if we insist on reading the Bible in this way, taking the words at face value, we will only make ourselves and our message ridiculous in the eyes of modern educated people, and that if we want to win them for the church we shall have to adjust our teaching to conform to the cultural patterns of the day and to the assured results of modern science. But such arguments always assume that if there is a conflict between the opinions of men and the teachings of the Bible, it is the teaching of the Bible that stands in the need of revision, whereas we ought to remember that it is the evil, unbelieving heart of man that needs to be renewed and the corrupt and blinded reason of man that needs to be enlightened.

Therefore let us continue to teach the Word in all its simplicity and purity, and the same Spirit who taught the holy writers which words to use in conveying this message to men will be with those words also in our time to help men to know and to understand the world in which they live, the God to whom they are accountable, the sin of which they are guilty, and the salvation that they have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.