
Pro Rege

Volume 7 | Number 1

Article 5

September 1978

Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth (Book Review)

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Recommended Citation

Cook, Harry (1978) "Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 7: No. 1, 25 - 26.

Available at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol7/iss1/5

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Book Reviews

by John M. Zinkand

Genesis One and The Origin of the Earth, by Robert C. Newman and Herman J. Eckelmann, Jr., InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1977, 156 pages, paperback, \$3.95. Reviewed by Harry Cook, Associate Professor of Biology.

Both authors of this book are astrophysicists-turned-theologians; one teaches New Testament at a seminary while the other is pastor of a church. As the jacket of the book suggests, the authors

propose that the question of origins can be answered only by carefully considering both the data of Scripture and the data of science. They describe the aim of their book as follows: "Our discussion is limited to a single facet of origins—the physical origin of the planet Earth. Attention is first directed to the physical data which appear to be relevant to a scientific model of the origin of the earth. Next, from among the serious options, a model for the synthesis of the scientific and biblical data is selected and defended on scientific grounds. We then will consider

the biblical data . . ." (p. 11).

Newman and Eckelmann evaluate various methods for estimating the age of the earth and conclude that this planet is very old. They discuss theories of the formation of the solar system and the planet earth and present their preference. They suggest that the model they accept is not in conflict with the witness of Scriptures.

The main part of the book is short, about 80 pages, and is followed by three papers. The first, an article by Daniel E. Wonderly, first appeared in the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* in 1975. It reviews various methods used to estimate the age of the earth. The second appendix is a reprint of an 1890 paper by William Henry Green which discusses why the genealogies in the Scriptures cannot be used to fix the date of Noah's flood or the creation of the world. The third appendix is an article by John R. Snow which argues that the creation days of Genesis are long indefinite periods. Thus the book and its appendices argue for an "old earth," progressive creationism, and long creation days.

The significance of the book, I feel, is that it is representative of a small but growing class of literature that avoids both theistic evolution and speculative theories to support the creationist viewpoint. (Another such book is the one by Davis A. Young, reviewed in *Pro Rege*, December, 1977.) The book avoids theories that have no basis in Scriptures or in scientific observation, and for this reason it is a helpful addition to the literature on origins.

A Half Century of Theology. Movements and Motives, by G.C. Berkouwer (translated and edited by Lewis B. Smedes), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977. 268 pages, \$6.95 paperbound. Reviewed by John C. Vander Stelt, Associate Professor in Theology and Philosophy.

Upon his retirement on October 12, 1973, as professor of dogmatics in the Faculty of Theology at the Free University, Berkouwer reflected on his theological activities of some fifty years within the world of Reformed churches and theology. These theological reflections he published in *Een Halve Eeuw Theologie: Stromingen en Motieven van 1920 tot Heden* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1974), the book Smedes has translated and edited for the English-speaking world.

As throughout his life, Berkouwer proves himself also in this book to be an expert in the

theology of the Reformation, the developments within Roman Catholic thought—for his expertise on this score, he was invited by the Roman Catholic Church to attend as an observer the Second Vatican Council—and the theological contributions of especially Karl Barth.

In eight chapters, Berkouwer reminisces in an engaging manner, peculiar to his way of thinking and writing, on the pattern and direction of theology as developed and suggested by such men as A. Kuyper, H. Bavinck, V. Hepp, A.H. de Hartog, K. Heim, E. Brunner, K. Barth, J. Moltmann, and W. Pannenberg.

The focus of his theological reflections centers on such key issues as the possibility of apologetics, the essence of church, the character of Scripture's authority, the doctrine of God, the nature of election and reprobation, the significance (particularly for eschatology) of earthly horizons, and the uniqueness and role of faith.

From the beginning to the end of the book, it is clear that Berkouwer wrestles with the interesting and complex question of how to relate biblically to the twentieth-century developments within the movements of Roman Catholicism, Barthianism, Marxism, and Humanism. It is possible to apply to Berkouwer himself what he writes about H. Bavinck's attempts to be relevant and reformed at the turn of the century, namely, that without becoming a relativist, Bavinck displayed a "commitment to truth combined with openness to problems" (18) and that he always sought to establish both contact and encounter with the consciousness of his culture (14).

A careful reading of this book of theological memoirs will cause the reader to experience for himself the truth of Berkouwer's statements in his "Foreword" that curiosity "works itself out in passionate study and serious listening to others" and that this "promises surprises, clearer insight, and deeper understanding—no matter from which direction they [i.e., surprises] come" (7-8).

One could and, perhaps, should regret Berkouwer's failure to point out the existentialist elements in K. Barth's theology and to be critical of the latter's understanding of the nature and task of theology. However, it would be detrimental to our own theological development not to appreciate and learn from Berkouwer's uncanny ability to cut through a number of theological knots and move doxologically beyond various, man-made dilemmas.

Eager to live and think at the vortex of our culture and modern theology, Berkouwer shuns fear and latches on to the power of biblical love and faith. In this spirit he writes that "escape into the future is not eschatology, but eschaton fever" (181) and that the life of the believer should not be