



GREENVILLE PRESBYTERIAN
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

6 DAYS ARE 6 DAYS

GPTS Faculty Statement on Creation

We the faculty of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary wish to acknowledge publicly our view on creation so that the churches and individuals supporting the Seminary may know what to expect from classroom instruction and faculty writing. In so doing, we note the following as preliminaries: (1) the issue of creation has long been considered a fundamental Christian belief, one that distinguishes Christianity from other religions; (2) this particular doctrine has been subject to prolonged attack since the mid-19th century, but continues to be critical for orthodoxy; (3) although the history of belief on this subject is clear, some fine and notable theologians from our communions have held differing views on this subject; and (4) that as a Seminary we are obligated not to teach contrary to the Westminster Standards. The Westminster Standards may be changed by the church courts, but, in our view, the seminaries ought not to be teaching contrary to those Standards, so that when there are changes they will occur as a result of the church's mature deliberation and not in a de facto manner.

Thus, we offer our view on the subject of creation as a school that serves a number of Reformed denominations, especially the PCA and the OPC.

- We believe that God's Word is not only inerrant, but that it is also clear to the learned and unlearned alike; thus, we affirm that when God reveals his mind—on creation or any other matter—he is quite capable of making his thoughts known in ordinary language that does not require extraordinary hermeneutical maneuvers for interpretation.
- Accordingly, we believe that when God revealed his creation as ex nihilo and by the power of his word, and when he surrounded the six days of creation with such phrases as "the first day . . . the nth day" and "evening" and "morning"—all phrases which would have been understood in their normal sense by Hebrews in the second millennium BC—that God himself intended to convey that the work of his creation spanned six ordinary days, followed by a seventh and non-continuous day which also spanned 24 hours like the other six days.

- We believe that an accurate study of OT texts does not support the gap theory, the framework hypothesis, the analogical theory, or the day-age view. Indeed, we find the OT creation texts to be interpreted as normal days, and no passage demands that Genesis 1-2 be re-engineered to yield other interpretations. The long history of rabbinical commentary, the very dating of time by the Hebrew calendar, and orthodox Jewish thought so understands these texts to embrace only days of ordinary length.
- The NT church and Scriptures offered no revisions of this view, and nowhere do those texts themselves advocate framework or day-age views. We certainly believe that if the wording of Genesis 1-2 required clarification or modification away from the normal meaning of the Hebrew terms, God would so indicate in the text itself, as well as in NT treatments of Genesis 1-2.
- The earliest post-canonical commentaries either advocated a 24-hour view of the days (e.g., Basil, Ambrose) or followed Augustine in a somewhat platonic scheme. Augustine's view, however, was that creation occurred instantaneously, and he nowhere enunciated a day-age view or a framework hypothesis.
- Until the Protestant Reformation, only two views were propagated: (1) the Augustinian view (followed by Anselm and John Colet) and (2) the literal 24-hour view (espoused by Aquinas, Lombard, and others).
- The magisterial Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Beza) adopted a uniform view, that of 24 hours, and overtly repudiated the Augustinian view.
- Prior to the Westminster Assembly, the leading Puritans (Ainsworth, Ames, Perkins) and others repudiated the Augustinian view and taught a sequential, normal day view.
- The Westminster Assembly divines either felt no need to comment on the length of days—so clearly was it established—or if they commented, they uniformly (either explicitly or implicitly) adopted the 24 hour view. With 60-80 divines normally attending sessions, at least 20 of the divines who did comment in other published writings indicate that they only understood the creation days to be 24-hour days (or ordinary days), and none have been found who espoused a contrary view. Specifically, there were no divines who wrote advocating a day-age view or a framework view. We continue to esteem them not only as confessional authors but also as faithful exegetes. We deny that certain scientific theories are so certain as to compel us to reinterpret Scripture on this matter.
- Following the Westminster Assembly, the testimony of the American Reformed tradition (e.g., J. Edwards) followed the tradition of Ussher/Perkins/Ames/The Westminster Divines on this question. No debate about this subject arises until after 1800, as the winds of various European views began to circulate.

- By the mid-nineteenth century, certain leading Presbyterians (C. Hodge, A. A. Hodge, and later Shedd and Warfield) began to conform their exegesis to the ascendant science of the day. We believe that this was a strategic and hermeneutical mistake, as well as a departure from the meaning of terms in the Westminster Standards.
- Leading southern Presbyterians (such as Thornwell, Dabney and Girardeau) however, simultaneously resisted efforts to broaden the church on this point, as is documented in the Woodrow trial and decisions.
- Early in the twentieth century, numerous evangelicals – and some seminaries – became overly concessive to a secular cosmology, departing from the historic view expressed in the Westminster standards on this subject.
- Some of us, at earlier times, were willing – due to love of the brethren and respect for esteemed teachers – to declare that the meaning of confessional language on this question was vague. We are no longer able in good conscience to do so. Both the normal meaning of the confessional phrases and the original intent as verified by other writings of the divines is now abundantly clear, with no evidence to the contrary.
- Even the secular confidence in earlier cosmologies is declining in some areas.
- Therefore, we declare our view shares the exegesis of the Westminster divines that led them to affirm that God created all things "in the space of six days" by the word of his power. We also believe that this clear meaning of confessional language should be taught in our churches and pulpits, and that departures from it should be properly safeguarded.
- Accordingly, we reject the following contemporary notions: (1) that John 5:17 teaches a continuing seventh day of creation; (2) that violent death entered the cosmos before the fall; (3) that ordinary providence was the only way that God governed and sustained the creation during the six days of creation; (4) that extraordinary literary sensitivities must be ascribed to pre-1800 audiences; and (5) that Scripture is unclear in its use of "evening and morning" attached to the days of creation.

We admit that some Christians have been too lax on this subject, and others have been too narrow. Hence, we hope to enunciate in this statement a moderate, historic, and biblical position. Even should other fine men differ with us on this subject, we hereby announce our intent to remain faithful to the teaching of the Westminster Standards and other Reformed confessions of faith on this subject.

To God alone be glory.

Note from G.I. Williamson

"I just read - for the first time - the superb statement of the GPTS faculty on six-day creation. I find in it, at last, my own honest evaluation, including reference to the unwise and unnecessary concession made by the great Princeton Divines. I've long concluded that we will never recover a reformational hermeneutic until this sad fact is faced up to. I cannot tell you how heartening it is to me that you men have had the integrity and courage to say what you have said. As I see it the doctrine of six-day creation is as clearly foundational and essential as any article of our faith. If the current state of things (in which several contradictory views are equally tolerated) continues, I do not see how we can keep the church from the same kind of manipulation of other (even essential) doctrines.

"Anyway, Dr. Pipa, I heartily thank you for taking this firm stand. I WISH IT WERE BETTER KNOWN THROUGHOUT REFORMED CHURCHES.

"In Christ,

"G.I. Williamson"

NOTE: G. I. Williamson is a semi-retired minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and editor of Ordained Servant. He has written several books, including The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes and The Heidelberg Catechism: A Study Guide.