

God vs Science: WSC Questions 8 & 9

In this discussion paper, we're going to look at three things:

- 1. How Creation and Providence relate to God's decrees*
- 2. Major Christian Views of Creation*
- 3. Advice for reading Genesis*

At the end, there are some "wrestling" questions at the end to think about before our class this week!

1. How Creation and Providence relate to God's Decree

The Westminster Shorter Catechism states:

Q7. What are the decrees of God?

The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, by which, for his own glory, he has foreordained everything that ever happens.

Q8. How does God carry out his decrees?

God carries out his decrees in the works of creation and providence.

Q9. What is the work of creation?

The work of creation is when God made all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.

The decrees of God refer to God's eternal plan. Before the world existed, God freely and wisely determined everything that would happen in history, for his glory.

Reformed theology therefore teaches that history is not random. The entire course of the world unfolds according to the wise plan of God.

Why does the catechism now speak about creation and providence?

We now shift from God's eternal decree to God's works in time.

God's decree is his plan - Creation and providence are the execution of that plan.

John Calvin says: *"Creation is the theatre of God's glory, and providence is the government of that theatre."* (Institutes, I.16)

The catechism distinguishes two stages:

Stage	Description
God's decree	His eternal plan before the world began
Creation	God bringing the world into existence (Questions 8, 9 & 10)
Providence	God sustaining and governing the world (Questions 11 & 12)

This distinction helps us understand that:

- God planned history before it began.
- God brought the world into existence through creation.
- God continues to rule and sustain it through providence.

2. Major Christian Views of Creation

Christians who affirm the authority of Scripture have taken several approaches to interpreting Genesis 1 and the age of the earth. Three major views are commonly discussed. Christians who affirm the authority of Scripture have taken several approaches to interpreting Genesis 1 and the age of the earth. Three major views are commonly discussed.

1. Literal Six-Day Creation (Young Earth Creationism)

This view understands the days of Genesis 1 as normal 24-hour days.

Key features of this view include:

- Creation occurred in six ordinary days.
- The earth is relatively young (often estimated around 6,000–10,000 years).
- The genealogies in Scripture are taken as largely complete.
- Genesis 1 is read as straightforward historical narrative.

Major advocates of this view include: John Calvin, Ken Ham, John MacArthur (and me!)

This view aligns closely with the wording of WSC Q9, which says creation occurred “in the space of six days.”

Supporters often summarise their approach simply:

If the Bible says “day,” we should take it as a day unless the text clearly indicates otherwise.

They also point to the pattern in Exodus 20:11, where Israel’s six-day work week is grounded in God’s six-day creation.

2. Old Earth Creationism

Old Earth Creationists try to reconcile the scientific evidence for an ancient universe (billions of years) with the Biblical truth that God directly created the world.

Different models exist, including:

- Day-age view – each “day” of Genesis represents a long period of time.
- Framework view – Genesis 1 is structured as a literary framework describing God’s ordering of creation rather than a strict chronology.
- Gap theory – a long period occurs between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

Major advocates include: Meredith Kline (framework interpretation), Tim Keller (sympathetic to framework/day-age views), BB Warfield (leans towards theistic evolution?)

This view maintains:

- God is still the direct Creator.
- Genesis is true, but may use literary structure or symbolic time periods.

While the scriptural basis for this view might be arguable (ie young earth and old earth creationists might disagree and debate, it is important to note that this view does affirm the story of Genesis 1-3 - the creation of a unique Adam and Eve, and a literal, specific fall into sin.

It is possible to hold this view while maintaining the salvation story that the Bible teaches (eg in Romans)

3. Theistic Evolution (Evolutionary Creation)

Theistic evolution teaches that God used evolutionary processes to bring about life.

Key features:

- The universe is billions of years old.
- Biological evolution is the mechanism by which life developed.
- God providentially guided the evolutionary process.

Major advocates include: Francis Collins (BioLogos), Alistair McGrath, NT Wright(!)

Some who hold this view see Genesis 1 primarily as theological literature, describing God as Creator without intending to explain the scientific process of creation.

This view has some significant scriptural difficulties, notably:

- The historical nature of Adam and Eve and the fall into sin
- The origin of death before the fall
- The relationship between Genesis and Romans 5

3. A Simple Reading of Genesis

A humble reading of Scripture should lead us to a straightforward interpretive principle:

When Scripture describes a day of creation, we read it as a day unless the text clearly indicates otherwise.

Genesis 1 repeatedly states:

“There was evening and there was morning – the first day.”

“The second day.”

“The third day.”

For this reason, Reformed Christians historically read the passage as describing six ordinary days of creation, while still acknowledging that faithful believers have held different interpretations.

The most important theological truth shared by all orthodox views is this: God created the world.

Creation was intentional, good, and ordered.

Human beings were created in God’s image.

These truths form the foundation for the doctrine of providence that the catechism discusses next.

Questions

1. Christians confess that God created the physical world and declared it “very good.” Yet in practice we are often more comfortable talking about “spiritual” things than about ordinary bodily life - work, food, rest, physical pleasure, or the natural world.

1. Why do you think that tension exists?
2. Where might our everyday attitudes toward the material world reveal that we do not fully believe creation is good?

2. Genesis presents human beings as intentionally created by God, yet modern culture often assumes that humanity is the result of unguided natural processes

1. Where do you feel the pressure of that alternative story in everyday life - in education, media, work, or cultural values?
2. What does that mean for the way we think about purpose, identity, or moral responsibility?

3. Genesis says that God made the world “very good.” But our experience of the world includes frustration, decay, and suffering.

1. How do these two realities hold together?
2. Where do you find it hardest to believe that the world we experience is still God’s good creation?