

March 5, 2020

Dear Fathers and Brothers of the Great Lakes-Gulf Presbytery,

As you are undoubtedly aware, three professors of Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary, namely Dr. Jeff Stivason, Dr. C.J. Williams, and myself, have prepared a review on Dr. Michael LeFebvre's book *The Liturgy of Creation* which also references his paper "Adam Reigns in Eden: Genesis and the Origins of Kingship." This cover letter accompanies our review in order to give a further explanation regarding the purpose of our review and clarify some misunderstandings that have arisen concerning it.

In the early fall of 2019, I began to receive numerous inquiries of concern at RPTS about our viewpoints regarding Dr. LeFebvre's aforementioned book and paper. As he serves as both Chairman of the RPTS Board and adjunct faculty at the seminary, I believed it our duty to familiarize ourselves with these works and, as RP pastors, elders, and others were asking for our perspective, provide a review of them. I asked Drs. Stivason and Williams to help me in this endeavor, with both our Faculty and Board approving of us doing so.

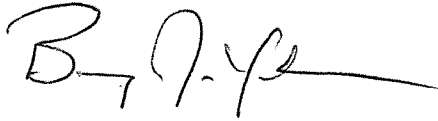
Over a three month period, we three professors read and studied these works, met several times to discuss them, and eventually produced the twenty-page review accompanying this letter. Earlier this year, at different times we submitted it to the Faculty, Dr. LeFebvre, and the Board. After a period of further internal review, we are making it available to you.

Several clarifications need to be made regarding our review.

- 1) This review is not to be seen as the official position of the Faculty or Board of RPTS, even though both the Faculty and Board are knowledgeable of the review. Neither the Faculty nor the Board have endorsed this review. Rather, it is the studied opinion of three RPTS faculty members.
- 2) This review was prepared prior to Dr. LeFebvre's letter to the Presbytery, so it does not address its contents.
- 3) Contrary to the comment in the Southfield Session's response to Dr. LeFebvre's letter, I did not "promptly refuse" to send the review to the committee chaired by Dr. Prutow when he requested it. Rather, Dr. Prutow and I had earlier agreed that the review would be ready by the time of your Presbytery meeting. Given that we knew his committee was recommending requesting our review at that time, I planned accordingly on my end to have the review ready for the Presbytery when this matter was brought before you. It has not been my intention either to impose our review on the church or refuse to make it known, but rather to cooperate with the church courts in such a way as to best promote the peace of the church.

As will be seen, our review expresses significant concerns over our brother's hermeneutical approach and some of the theological perspectives contained in his writings. Given that Dr. LeFebvre is deeply respected by us and has been so involved in the ministry of RPTS, we have only arrived at these conclusions through agonizing over them and grieving over this disagreement with our brother. Please know I am praying earnestly for you in your deliberations.

In Christ's Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. York', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Barry York, President
Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary

A Review of *The Liturgy of Creation*
 Jeffrey A. Stivason, Ph.D.
 C.J. Williams, Ph.D.
 Barry York, D.Min.

Dr. Michael LeFebvre is the pastor of Christ Church (Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America) and an Old Testament scholar who focused on the civil law in his *Collection, Codes, and Torah: The Re-Characterization of Israel's Written Law* (T&T Clark, 2006). He is the author of numerous other books and publications.¹ LeFebvre's most recent work, and the subject of this review, is *The Liturgy of Creation: Understanding Calendars in Old Testament Context* (*TLoC*, IVP Academic, 2019).

As questions and concerns regarding *TLoC* were presented to Reformed Presbyterian Theological Seminary's administration and faculty, Professors Stivason, Williams, and York were asked to give a thorough review of this book. As LeFebvre serves as an adjunct professor at RPTS (the denominational seminary of the RPCNA) as well as chairman of its Board of Trustees, the faculty believed such a review was warranted. Though RPTS faculty regularly publish reviews of a shorter nature in theological journals, given the nature of the concerns and LeFebvre's connection to RPTS, this review is more substantial than standard ones. This committee's analysis of *TLoC* is offered in the hopes it will encourage the author and the church in properly processing the contents and implications of the book's teachings. We offer this review having tremendous respect for Dr. LeFebvre's scholarly achievements, service, and contribution to the church and RPTS.

Overview

TLoC consists of twelve chapters that establish LeFebvre's studied understanding that the festivals in Israel's calendar as recorded in the Pentateuch are based on the seasonal activity of creation witnessed in the heavenly bodies and earth's agricultural cycles. From there, LeFebvre postulates that these festivals of Israel and their given dates explain the way the creation week found in Genesis is structured. As such, LeFebvre postulates that the creation weekdays serve more as a patterned expression of worship liturgy leading to Sabbath than as markers of actual time. The liturgical patterns indicated in the creation week are then to inform as a guide to how God wants his people to work and then worship on the Sabbath Day.

¹ Some of the notable works LeFebvre has authored or contributed to include *William Symington: Penman of the Scottish Covenanters* (with Roy Blackwood, Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), *Our Triune God: Living in the Love of the Three-in-One* (with Philip Ryken, Crossway, 2011), *Leviticus: A 12-Week Study* (Knowing the Bible Series, Crossway, 2011), *Singing the Songs of Jesus: Revisiting the Psalms* (Christian Focus, 2012), *The Gospel and Sexual Orientation* (Crown & Covenant, 2012), and *Exploring Ecclesiastes: Joy That Perseveres* (Day One, 2016).

Contributions of the Work

As an Old Testament scholar, LeFebvre's knowledge of a vast array of scholars and their works, and their subsequent theories, is impressive. His modest-length book of 256 pages contains a twenty-two page bibliography that ranges from church fathers to reformers to modern day theologians. With over 420 footnotes, he substantiates his work throughout. The book contains two sections of charts that lay out the festival weeks and dated events of the Pentateuch in a visibly appealing and helpful style, along with other smaller charts that help the reader see his points. Though scholarly in nature, LeFebvre's writing is lucid and approachable.

LeFebvre seeks to honor authorial (or redactor) intent, not by explaining away what he sees as discrepancies in dated Old Testament events, but rather by embracing, then fitting, these dates into his theory of the connection of the creation week with the feasts and festivals of Israel. Clearly numerous scholars in his field view LeFebvre's work as a significant contribution to understanding the Israelite calendar. Those endorsing his book call it "essential reading," "exegetically rigorous," "theologically sophisticated," and a demonstration of LeFebvre being a "master teacher with pastoral sensitivity." Whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, one cannot read LeFebvre's book without gaining new perspective into Israel's cultic practices, details about the festive days of Israel, exegetical insights into the Hebrew text, the pastoral nature of God's creative and redemptive handiwork, and a deeper appreciation for the Sabbath.

This latter topic, that of LeFebvre's emphasis on the Sabbath Day with a proper cadence of work and rest, is a strength of the book. He explains well and thoroughly his concern that many treatments of the creation week, as recorded in the opening chapter of Genesis, often fall short of highlighting that God has set one day in seven as a time for reflection and worship. Clearly, LeFebvre desires the church in "our age of intense social strain, economic pressures, political tensions, and widespread Christian lukewarmness ... to bring our mundane labors into the worshipful cadence of hope and faith" he believes the creation account of Genesis 1 teaches.² His concluding chapter contains rich meditations on how the Old Testament Sabbath pointed toward the "new resurrection-focused Lord's Day."³

The reviewers also believe that LeFebvre has pursued his thesis in a manner that is conscientious of being an ordained minister of the RPCNA. He openly states in his preface that he has sought the counsel of his elders, recognizes that his views are not meant to represent the RPCNA, and, with respect to the length of the creation days, believes his positions are within the framework of the 2002 decision of Synod regarding this matter.⁴ Michael's peaceable spirit as a theologian has been demonstrated on many occasions in the courts of the church, and he clearly maintains that demeanor in this work.

However, we believe that there are several substantial concerns with LeFebvre's approach and thesis that, given the complexity and depth of the arguments, require careful analysis and further

² Michael LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2019), 219-220.

³ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

explain the lengthiness of this review. The two loci of our concern are the hermeneutical approach of *TLoC* and its theological implications.

The Hermeneutical Concerns Regarding *TLoC*

Before dealing with the hermeneutical problems of *TLoC*, we want to acknowledge along with Michael that a careful study of the Bible can, and often does, raise problems, some of them extremely difficult. As exegetes, we must not only face these problems but wrestle long with them. However, it is crucial to add that the manner we use to address these problems is of primary importance. If we use faulty methods in our wrestling and arrive at wrong solutions, we will only compound the problem. The same could be said for the tendency to use legitimate methods faultily, to the expense of honesty and integrity. Consequently, wisdom and caution are the need of the hour, but caution should never remove from our hands legitimate hermeneutical methods.

Our review then finds three main difficulties with the hermeneutical principles employed by LeFebvre.

1) Skepticism of Internal Intertextual Harmonization

The first hermeneutical problem faced by *TLoC* is its skeptical view toward the harmonization of passages including dates and events that appear to be in discrepancy with one another. For instance, LeFebvre contends that Gospel harmonies “come at a cost.”⁵ He adds that “it is often necessary to strain the narratives or to add extra assumptions into them in order to bring them into greater ‘agreement.’”⁶ Surprisingly, LeFebvre quotes from *Duplik* by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, no friend of orthodox Christianity, which says, “O that most excellent Harmony which can only reconcile two contradictory reports, both stemming from the evangelists, by inventing a third report, not a syllable of which is to be found in any individual evangelist!”⁷ LeFebvre’s assessment of harmonization is twofold. First, he believes that a Gospel harmony may “help assuage one’s discomfort” at the discovery of inconsistencies.⁸ Second, he contends that “harmonization efforts have generally been regarded as unpersuasive.”⁹

Instead of internal harmonizing of dated texts, LeFebvre suggests another way forward. He shows the need for forward progress by bringing us to an example in the Gospel accounts. LeFebvre compares the Synoptic Gospel accounts with that of John’s gospel and highlights a problem. According to LeFebvre, Mark is the most chronological in his presentation, though “the

⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 4-5. The reviewer’s surprise over this quotation arises from Lessing’s known critique of the historical veracity of miracles and fulfilled prophecy in the Gospels. In his work *On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power*, Lessing argued, “If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is: accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason,” which has now become famous as Lessing’s Ugly Ditch, a term he himself coined in this work.

⁸ Ibid., 4.

⁹ Ibid., 5.

timing preserved by Matthew and Luke matches that of Mark.”¹⁰ However, the problem is uncovered when one looks to John’s Gospel. LeFebvre writes, “John says that Jesus held his Last Supper with the disciples on the day ‘before the Feast of Passover (Jn 13:1), not on Passover night as indicated by the Synoptics.’”¹¹ What is more, LeFebvre points out that there is a “second chronological detail reported differently in John” and it is “the time of day Jesus was nailed to the cross.”¹² According to LeFebvre, Mark puts the crucifixion at a morning hour (Mk 15:25) and John puts it at the noon hour (Jn 19:14).

To be sure, LeFebvre is not arguing for inept authors. He knows that these crucifixion accounts were not “poorly compiled” documents that simply overlooked “obvious timing differences.”¹³ Nor is LeFebvre arguing that the time sequence is in question. For LeFebvre, the date is not in question, since all four gospels agree that Jesus was resurrected on Sunday. So, for what is LeFebvre contending? He seems to be arguing that the text is a theological construct rather than a historical narrative. In other words, LeFebvre is arguing that the New Testament authors are “using different chronological scenarios” in order to “teach us something about the nature of Christ’s crucifixion.”¹⁴

LeFebvre argues for his position by analogy. He contends that an “historian of American independence would be expected to identify Tuesday, July 2, 1776, as the date Congress declared independence from Great Britain.”¹⁵ However, Americans celebrate independence on July 4th, which was the date that Congress finally approved and published the final text of the Declaration. Thus, LeFebvre contends that an “historian operating by ancient conventions might ascribe the independence event to its celebration date (July 4) without violating the integrity of his report by doing so.”¹⁶ However, bringing this example to bear upon the gospel chronology is not a consistent comparison. For, in LeFebvre’s example from American history, there are two actual and distinct events. On July 2nd, the Continental Congress declared their independence and on July 4th, the same declaration was published.

However, with regard to the story of Jesus’ crucifixion, there is only one historical event (i.e. the Passover meal). According to LeFebvre, the Synoptics place the crucifixion after the Passover meal and John’s gospel “dates the crucifixion to the afternoon *before* the Passover meal ...”¹⁷ In other words, according to LeFebvre, all four gospel writers relate the timing of the crucifixion to the Passover meal, but in the telling of the story the gospel writers do not tell the actual sequence of events so much as they arrange them in order to communicate something theological about the death of Christ.

¹⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 3

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 3. Emphasis his.

Having posed the problem as it stands in the Synoptic Gospels and John, LeFebvre contends for a way forward. According to LeFebvre, the trustworthiness of the Gospels should not be based on our ability to harmonize disparate accounts. Rather, “It is better to face the differences and consider why the authors used their descriptive latitude to record events as they did.”¹⁸ As seen below in our second and third hermeneutical concerns, LeFebvre uses this concept of “descriptive latitude” in Parts I and II of his book in addressing the dates of Pentateuchal festival events as well.

Consequently, LeFebvre asks why the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 is written as it is. LeFebvre’s answer is to the point. In the same way that the Gospel writers used the Passover date to align Christ’s sacrifice with the fulfillment of the old covenant festival of Passover, so Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a “calendar narrative” or “a special kind of historical narrative in which historical events are given dates of a festival observance ... without regard for the timing of the original occurrence.”¹⁹

However, this construal presents several problems. First, LeFebvre’s dismissal of internal harmonization and what he calls a “journalistic way” of “time stamping texts” calls into question the dual authorship of Scripture. For example, Raymond Dillard argues that the legitimacy of “harmonization draws its principal operating strength from its theological warrant. God is true and cannot lie, and the Scriptures share in this attribute.”²⁰ In his *Biblical Hermeneutics*, Gerhard Maier has said, “Today the notion is widely prevalent that biblical revelation exhibits *no* unity. Old and New Testament are said to be ‘everything but unified’; indeed, they ‘abound in contradictions.’”²¹ This has led modern scholars to reject attempts at harmonization.²² Maier contends, “In the history of theology, however, we find not even one ‘No!’ to such attempts.”²³ Thus, LeFebvre’s methodology seems to place primary emphasis on the human authors of Scripture to the exclusion of the divine.

What is more, LeFebvre’s articulation of the Apostle’s re-telling of the gospel story puts history and theology in opposition to one another with no way to reconcile the two. Yet, this is an intractable position “because God has placed the two in harmony” according to Vern Poythress.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid., 5.

¹⁹ Ibid., 6-7.

²⁰ Harvie M. Conn, *Inerrancy and Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1988), 156.

²¹ Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1994), 187.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 206.

²⁴ Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels: A God-Centered Approach to the Challenges of Harmonization* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2012), 38. J. A. Alexander wrote in the Princeton Review, “The true use of Harmonies is threefold, Exegetical, Historical, Apologetical. By mere juxtaposition, if judicious, the Gospels may be made to throw light upon each other’s obscure places. By combination, not mechanical but rational, not textual but interpretative, harmonies put it in our power, not to grind, or melt, or boil four Gospels into one, but out of the four, kept apart, yet viewed together, to extract one history for ourselves. And lastly, by the endless demonstration of the possible solutions of apparent or alleged discrepancies, even where we may not be prepared to choose among them, they reduce the general charge of falsehood or of contradiction, not only *ad absurdum*, but to a palpable impossibility.” And, “This most important end of Gospel Harmonies has been accomplished. It has been established, beyond all reasonable doubt, that however the evangelists may differ, and however hard it may be often to explain

What is more, according to Poythress, “Harmonization is possible because God is consistent with himself.”²⁵ It is true that “each gospel may highlight particular theological emphases through the way in which it presents its account of an episode.”²⁶ However, divine meaning precedes the events themselves.²⁷ Thus, “the gospels draw out meanings and implications that God’s plan assigned to the events from before the foundation of the world.”²⁸ Poythress is simply arguing for the theological warrant of harmonization. Again, Dillard says, “[it] is the belief in the divine origin and authority of the Bible that has given harmonization its hold in exegetical method.”²⁹

LeFebvre’s statements rejecting harmonization appear to carry two implications. First, LeFebvre is either unaware of or is denying the *theological* warrant of harmonization. His previous statements indicated the latter. And second, LeFebvre seems to emphasize fallible human authorship with regard to Scripture. For example, regarding alleged contradictions in the text of Scripture, LeFebvre believes that “the best explanation is found not by resolving or smoothing over these differences but by listening to them.”³⁰ Thus, LeFebvre seems to be arguing that truth is to be found in the tension of two contradictory statements. Thus, whether or not Jesus was crucified before or after the Passover meal matters little, so long as we get the theology right, that is, Jesus is our Passover.

LeFebvre might likely contend that we have misread him. For example, he would almost certainly claim that he is not minimizing divine authorship or emphasizing fallible human authorship. Instead, he would argue that the authors strategically planned these inconsistencies for theological purposes, and it is our modern journalistic expectations that are the problem and not the incongruities in the text. However, as Oswald T. Allis relates, he once heard an Old Testament critic who said, after pointing out several examples of apparently contradictory statements, “Criticism has a simple solution of these contradictions, but though it can explain them, it cannot remove or explain them away.”³¹ Strikingly, this seems to be what LeFebvre is saying. He is able to give us an explanation as to why John differs from the Synoptic Gospels, but he cannot remove the contradiction. Yet, as Allis said, “Truth cannot be secured by combining errors.”³² At this point, it appears that LeFebvre is not simply emphasizing fallible human authors but treating them as though they were the only authors.

It is important to remember that LeFebvre dismisses internal harmonization out of hand. According to him, it is simply a method of assuaging one’s discomfort at finding conflicting statements in the Bible. He is not alone. Many modern scholars find harmonization to be artificial and contrived. This is not to say that there have not been those attempts that have this

the difference, they never, in a single instance, contradict each other.” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, 28, (1856), (1–4), 395–396.

²⁵ Poythress, *Inerrancy and the Gospels*, 47.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Conn, 157. Blomberg argues that harmonization in its broadest sense “is virtually identical with inquiry into the legitimacy of systematic theology per se or into unity and diversity of biblical theology” (p. 139).

³⁰ LeFebvre, 2-3.

³¹ Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1943), 124.

³² *Ibid.*, 124.

very feel to them. Craig Blomberg writes, “The implausibility of the proposed harmonizations of certain conservative scholars only reinforces the criticism of the majority.”³³ Nevertheless, Allis writes,

The critics decry the harmonistic method of interpretation as unscientific and unscholarly. We believe that, on the contrary, this old and time honored method of interpretation is quite as scientific and scholarly as any other which can be proposed and that the destructive conclusions to which the divisive method of the critics leads are a cogent argument in favor of the older and better method. Critics of the Bible would do well to bear in mind that advice of Coleridge: ‘When we meet an apparent error in a good author, we are to presume ourselves *ignorant of his understanding*, until we are certain that we *understand his ignorance*.’³⁴

To this conclusion we may well add other voices, such as Dillard who adds plenty of examples from day-to-day household affairs. Harmonization is a basic feature of daily life.³⁵ What is more, Blomberg argues persuasively that harmonization cannot be understood as a one-size-fits-all method for Biblical interpretation and so be seriously rejected out of hand.³⁶

In contrast to this view, James Barr argued in his *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* for multiple authors of the Pentateuch. He said, “Only the recognition of source division can do justice to what is actually said in the passages concerned. Characteristic conservative treatments, as I have shown, depart from the natural meaning of the texts in order to force upon them an apologetically-motivated harmonization which will evade the fact of the contradiction.”³⁷ We bring this into view because LeFebvre seems to go in the same direction. Rather than hold Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, LeFebvre describes the author of the Pentateuch as “the writer”³⁸, the “compiler of the Pentateuch”³⁹ and the “original compiler.”⁴⁰

What is more, in chapter 5, LeFebvre argues for what he calls “a catalogue of ‘incongruities’” in the Pentateuch. He also speaks of “chronological idiosyncrasies that have been widely recognized in scholarly discussions of the text.”⁴¹ He speaks of “problems” noted by critical scholars, such as, the “discrepancy” regarding Israel’s journey to Sinai, and the “existence of ‘contradictory’ timing reports.”⁴² Of course, LeFebvre states that this “evidence” is not provided to “poke at the Pentateuch but rather expose the inappropriateness of reading its dates

³³D. A. Carson & J. D. Woodbridge, Eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2005), 139.

³⁴Allis, 125 (emphasis his). The reviewers have sought to follow this principle as well.

³⁵Conn, 153.

³⁶Carson & Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 144.

³⁷James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1980), 78.

³⁸LeFebvre, 93.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 119.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, 83, 85.

anachronistically as journalistic chronology.”⁴³ Nevertheless, according to LeFebvre, “Genuine problems have been identified in the texts that deserve careful assessment by the church.”⁴⁴

For example, LeFebvre argues that the “flood dates demonstrably cannot be actual occurrence dates.”⁴⁵ The journey to Sinai, says LeFebvre, has both the actual timing of Israel’s journey to Sinai, as well as its festival observance timing, but the actual times are in contradiction to one another.⁴⁶ Regarding attempts to harmonize the text, LeFebvre writes, “These attempts merely underscore the existence of ‘contradictory’ timing reports and the fact that the book’s penman was not concerned to ‘correct’ the ‘contradiction.’”⁴⁷ However, if the penman was not concerned with actual timing, one must wonder why he included actual timing in his account. LeFebvre provides the same sort of evidence for the date of the Tabernacle’s installation, the journey from Hor to Nebo, and other one-day events. LeFebvre says that his list is not exhaustive but it is representative of timing incongruities that we encounter in the Bible.

At the end of this chapter, LeFebvre says something a bit perplexing. Having taken us through a series of alleged contradictions in the text, he writes, “This catalogue of timing incongruities is not exhaustive, but it is representative. Nor is it gathered here to suggest the text is confused or inconsistent.”⁴⁸ What is LeFebvre saying? The answer is rather transparent. LeFebvre does not believe that these “timing incongruities” or contradictions can be harmonized, but he does believe that they can be explained. For example, returning to the gospel problem LeFebvre started with, he says that the Synoptic Gospels “align Jesus’ Last Supper with the Passover meal because it is this meal and its message of peace with God through sacrifice that provides the basis for the New Testament Communion table.”⁴⁹ However, continues LeFebvre, “John shows that Jesus is our Passover Lamb by aligning his crucifixion with the time when lambs were being gathered for the festival slaughter.”⁵⁰ Thus, the contradictions or incongruities between accounts can be explained, but they cannot be removed, which argues against both harmonization and divine authorship.

What is more, for LeFebvre, the explanation *of* the text must be brought *to* the text of Scripture. Think of it like this. The Bible, as argued by critical scholars, is blurry or out of focus due to the inconsistencies and contradictions in the text. However, the right cultural, scientific, or socio-political spectacles can bring clarity of vision to the text. The problem with this sort of thinking is that the spectacles, whatever they may happen to be, displace the Scriptures as the *principium cognoscendi*, or the principle of knowing, and make the spectacles themselves the principle of knowing.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 108.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 84.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 85.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Take the example of allowing the land to enjoy a Sabbath year, that it might continue in fruitfulness, which is a regulation given in Exodus 23:10-11. After talking about modern fertilizers, LeFebvre posits, “There is, however, one serious problem with the septennial pattern for fallowing the land. On its own, the one year in seven would not be enough.”⁵¹ LeFebvre goes on to quote an ancient near east scholar as saying, “A single fallow year in seven did not suffice ...”⁵² After introducing various field rotational schemes that might have been employed in Israel, LeFebvre concludes, “We lack sufficient evidence to resolve the question of how Israel practiced adequate land fallowing. But we do know that some system like one of these alternatives – or perhaps a variety of these and other practices – must have been observed.”⁵³ The point is that LeFebvre seems to allow the modern knowledge of nutritional demands to argue against the clear meaning of the text. Thus, the text cannot actually mean that a field would lay fallow one year in seven because today’s agricultural scientists know that cannot be enough. Given his repeated insistence throughout the book that we cannot allow modern science to interpret the creation text, the reviewers find this example, along with other ones employing similar reasoning, ironic.

At this point, we are able to draw several conclusions by having examined LeFebvre’s anti-harmonization hermeneutic. These conclusions may or may not be what LeFebvre actually believes, but they are conclusions that may be drawn from the positions he takes in his book. First, LeFebvre’s approach appears to place a premium on the human authorship of Scripture. Second, LeFebvre believes that there were multiple authors of the Pentateuch and possibly an original compiler. Third, having focused on human authorship, LeFebvre believes that the Bible contains contradictory accounts of the same historical events. Fourth, interpreters are able to explain the aim and intent of these fallible human authors, but the contradictions cannot be harmonized to any degree of satisfaction nor should they be. Fifth, LeFebvre substitutes internal harmonization for a different type of harmonization, as will be seen below.⁵⁴ Sixth, LeFebvre believes that his view of calendar narrative is a valuable explanation to help the reader understand various contradictory texts.

2) An Ancient Anachronistic View of Israel’s Calendar

Though LeFebvre’s work seeks to distance itself from employing *modern* anachronistic hermeneutics back into Israel’s calendar, unfortunately, we believe that this methodology comes at the expense of him utilizing an *ancient* anachronistic hermeneutic. Yes, it is an error to read modern beliefs and practices back into early texts with millennia of time separating them. But it can also be erroneous to read all of Israel’s experience in the Promised Land back into the festival calendar and, further still, back into the creation account. For rather than setting forth the

⁵¹ Ibid., 30.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁴ The authors of this review would note that we have not offered attempts to harmonize the texts raised here. We did not believe that was necessary, as that task is beyond the scope of our review, the several references we have given testify readily to the prominence of harmonization, and numerous commentaries and works already exist that give satisfactory answers to these questions.

creation week and the redemptive themes that follow as foundational to the Biblical interpretation of the feasts, LeFebvre does just the opposite.

The main premise of Part I of *TLoC* is that Israel's calendar, governed by the sun and moon, provided the agricultural pattern for the land, and that the harvest times were marked by the seven worship festivals. The yearly agricultural experience of the land of Israel, set to the "clock" in the skies, is thus seen as the catalyst for the liturgical calendar.

As this premise pertains to the ultimate point of the book – that the creation week is a calendar narrative – it misses the mark. Days, months, and years are clearly defined by the movements of the sun and moon, but the seven-day week that culminates in the Sabbath has no such celestial basis.⁵⁵ Neither does the seven-day week have a clear connection to agricultural patterns, like the festival calendar. The plain reading and historical understanding of Gen. 1:1-2:3 is that the divine work of creation explains the origin of the seven-day week, but for LeFebvre's thesis to hold true – that the creation account reflects the notion of a work week rather than establishes it – he must locate the origin of the seven-day week elsewhere. LeFebvre says, "The origin of the seven-day week is debated, but most scholars believe that the week is a grouping of days based on the symbolism of the number seven."⁵⁶ He also offers a conjectural explanation based on the phases of the moon, but admits that it is "speculative" and "sketchy."⁵⁷ Leaving these "debated" and "speculative" theories behind, LeFebvre later argues that the weekly pattern of work and Sabbath rest that was legislated and observed in Israel was projected backward onto the creation account to be a sort of "guide to the Hebrew farmer to work and worship each week as God's steward."⁵⁸ Thus, LeFebvre seems to ultimately locate the origin of the seven-day pattern in the experience of the people inhabiting and farming the land, with the creation account and the Fourth Commandment being later reflections of an established pattern. The primary problem with this thesis is that the creation account and Sinaitic legislation are relegated to being mere reflections of the post-Mosaic agricultural experience of Israel in the land.

LeFebvre's explanation of the festivals in entirely agricultural terms is also problematic. This approach is not new, and its most obvious feature is to disregard much of the explicit Scriptural

⁵⁵ "Whereas in the Hebrew calendar (and those of other peoples) the days, months, and years were related to the solar and lunar cycles, the Sabbath is not tied to any celestial movement. The Sabbath thus underlines the fundamental idea of Israelite monotheism: that God is wholly outside of nature." Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary (Broadman & Holman, 1996), 179.

⁵⁶ LeFebvre, 26.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

depictions of the festivals in favor of a purely agricultural explanation.⁵⁹ Thus LeFebvre summarizes the festival calendar:

The seven major festivals were grouped around the three harvest periods in the land. The beginning of the barley harvest was marked by Passover, Firstfruits, and Unleavened Bread. The beginning of wheat harvest was marked by the Feast of Weeks. These two spring festivals took place at the beginnings of the two grain harvests, which allowed work crews to organize for the year's most intense periods of labor. The final harvest celebration was held at the end of all the summer harvests, with the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths. This allowed households to manage their various summer harvests at different timings as suitable and to bring from their bounty for community feasting at the end of the year.⁶⁰

Such a characterization of the liturgical year seems to almost completely ignore the Biblical description of the purpose and significance of most of the festivals. For instance, the Day of Atonement is described purely in terms of its cultic purpose (Lev 16). Observances such as Passover and Unleavened Bread are specifically instituted as memorials of God's saving acts and are commanded to be explained as such to future generations (Ex 12:26, 27; 13:8). Passover is never explicitly accorded any agricultural significance in the Bible. Firstfruits, which occurs the same week as Passover and Unleavened Bread, anticipates the harvest in the land that Israel was to inherit. Thus, three festivals in eight days combine to commemorate God's acts of salvation in the past and look forward to His blessing in the future. The legislation of these festivals came at Sinai and thus before Israel had any agricultural experience in the Promised Land. Some of the festivals obviously anticipate the agricultural cycle that Israel had yet to experience, but to suggest that the entire festival calendar emerges from the agricultural cycle is to "put the cart before the horse," and also contradict the explicit historical and cultic reasons given in the Scriptures for several of the festivals.

3) An Agricultural Basis Rather Than a Truly Redemptive Rendering of the Festivals and Their Stories

The main thesis of Part II of *TLoC* is that the dates given for events in the Pentateuch are assigned by the author to coincide with festivals, and do not represent the actual, historical occurrence of these events. LeFebvre argues that the redemption narratives of Scripture are crafted to provide a theological framework for the agricultural cadences of the festival calendar.

⁵⁹ Higher-critical scholars of the Pentateuch routinely locate the origin of Israelite festivals in the agricultural experience of Israel and view the Scriptural narrative as being a later attempt to historicize the festivals. For instance, Erhard Gerstenberger writes, "More recent theories suggest that Passover and Unleavened Bread always existed as a single spring festival – small livestock herding and grain agriculture were two pillars of the Israelite agrarian economy – and that probably only during the exile were they 'historicized,' that is, associated with the narrative motif of the exodus from Egypt." Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, The Old Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 342. Likewise, Jacob Milgrom states, "The consensus holds that both the Paschal Offering and the Unleavened Bread originated as firstfruit festivals, the former observed by shepherds and the latter by farmers to ensure the fertility of their respective flocks and crops." Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus*, A Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 276.

⁶⁰ LeFebvre, 52.

The evidence offered, however, does not prove the thesis. Many examples of “dated events” offered by LeFebvre are events that establish the liturgical calendar and its festivals. LeFebvre’s thesis that these events are assigned dates from the liturgical calendar is to reason in the wrong direction – from calendar to text rather than from text to calendar. For instance, of the four events LeFebvre examines which are assigned to New Year’s Day, one is the actual establishment of the beginning of the calendar by God in Exodus 12:1-2, where He says, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you” (with no mention of the first day). To say that the establishment of the first month of the calendar by God is an event that is editorially assigned to New Year’s Day because of the liturgical calendar is to reason from the wrong direction. Another one of the “New Year’s Day events” examined by LeFebvre is the death of Miriam, but the text only says she died “in the first month” when the people arrived in Kadesh (Nu 20:1).

Of the seven events dated to the Passover examined in this chapter, the first four are from the original Passover institution itself (Ex 12, 13). It is logical, of course, that the institution of the Passover would contain its dates for observance. One could only take these examples as evidence of LeFebvre’s thesis if we were to believe that the date of the institution of the Passover is retrospectively fixed in the narrative based on the later practice of Passover in its agriculturally significant role. LeFebvre’s mistake is in going against the organic, progressive flow of Scripture by putting the *observance* of the festivals before the *establishment* of them in Scripture.

Four dated events in the Pentateuch do not coincide with any festivals, but LeFebvre is quick to assign them agricultural significance. For instance, the flood began on the 17th day of the 2nd month (Gen 7:11), a date when there is no festival, but LeFebvre makes it significant for “the fear of God’s judgement on the year’s harvest.”⁶¹ This is a very conjectural assumption and shows a tendency by the author to force all dated events of the Pentateuch into the paradigm of agricultural significance.

Regarding the duration of the flood, LeFebvre points to the text’s equation of five months to 150 days as proof that the author is using a schematic calendar, since five months would technically be 147 or 148 days.⁶² The Biblical text’s lack of precision here is an odd basis on which to make the claim that its dates are not to be considered literal, especially as LeFebvre makes the case that we are not to look for mathematical or scientific precision from the Bible.⁶³ In any case, what lasted 150 days is the floodwaters “prevailing on the earth,” and, after that time, “the waters decreased” (Gen 7:24; 8:3). Water “prevailing” and “decreasing” are hardly things that permit an exact timing, but what exactly is timed by the text is the day it started to rain and the day that the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat, which are events that can be pinpointed to the day - and are (Gen 7:11; 8:4). So, the 150 days is a generalization of the time that water was on the earth, but the dates of the text point to exact events. The text does not equate five months to 150 days,

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² Ibid., 83-84.

⁶³ Ibid., 212f.

but LeFebvre calls this his “prima facie evidence that the author of Genesis was using what scholars call a schematic calendar.”⁶⁴

This section of the book also magnifies what LeFebvre calls “discrepancies” in the dated events of the Pentateuch that prove the dates given are retrospectively assigned liturgical dates rather than actual occurrence dates. The most compelling example he gives is the date of the installation of the Tabernacle, but he stretches the evidence to make his point.⁶⁵ From the people’s departure from Egypt (Ex 12:6) to the erection of the Tabernacle (Ex 40:2, 17) is roughly a year, a timeframe in which, LeFebvre says, all the intervening events could not have happened.⁶⁶ However, most of the intervening events are not timed, but LeFebvre conjecturally assigns them time to “prove” a much longer intervening period than a year. LeFebvre does not even allow for a period of five months to be sufficient for the Tabernacle’s construction, which “proves” that the completion date of the Tabernacle could not have actually landed on the first day of the first month of the second year, as Scripture says (Ex 40:17). This appears to be special pleading on LeFebvre’s part.

Carrying his point further, LeFebvre turns to the Psalms in an attempt to demonstrate that the historical settings found in Psalm titles are also not historically time-based. Once again, his argument is based on a string of assumptions that are unprovable from the text. For instance, the title of Psalm 57 is “A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave,” yet LeFebvre doubts that David could have composed the Psalm at that point, saying it is unlikely that he was “poring over his parallelisms while panting in the shadows.”⁶⁷ But it is not so hard to believe; the Apostle Paul pored over his epistles from a prison cell, and the Prophet Jonah prayed a most sublime prayer from the belly of the great fish. The historical settings of inspired texts are not always what we may expect them to be, but this fact does not give us reason to doubt or question their historical accuracy.

At the end of Part II, LeFebvre introduces his thesis regarding the creation week, saying, “The dates do not reflect original occurrence timing but rather later Israel’s legally instructed observance timing.”⁶⁸ The basic argument, then, is that the seven-day cycle of work and rest first grew out of Israel’s experience, was later legislated, and finally projected back into the narrative of Genesis 1. Ironically, LeFebvre quotes the fourth commandment at this point, which is precisely the text that refutes his argument. The explicit reason given for us to observe this seven-day cycle is the example of God’s work in the creation week, which is the sole origin of the very idea of a seven-day week. There is no celestial or agricultural basis to it, but only the creative work of God as described in the Scriptures. LeFebvre’s thesis makes Genesis 1 a reflection of man’s experience of work and rest, rather than our experience being a reflection of God’s example. The fourth commandment essentially says: “Do this . . . because God did it.” LeFebvre’s thesis, though aiming to uphold the Sabbath, turns the basis for so doing to Israel’s calendar rather than to God’s clear, direct command.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 86-87.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 109.

Perhaps the most concerning thing about LeFebvre's treatment of the festivals and the Sabbath is the lack of emphasis on the redemptive-historical perspective by which we can clearly see these ancient observances as pointing forward to Christ. The Apostle Paul said that the festivals, new moons, and sabbaths were "a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:16-17). Although the Old Testament saints only saw the shadow of the Messiah in their festivals, the New Testament sheds bright light on the original and primary intent of the festival calendar as pointing to Christ and His work. Jesus' death was timed to take place on Passover, His burial to coincide with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, His resurrection on the Feast of Firstfruits, and the outpouring of the Spirit fifty days later on Pentecost.⁶⁹ Further, the New Testament regularly applies the imagery and terminology of the festivals to describe the fulfillment of Christ's work, most notably Passover (John 1:29; I Cor 5:7), Firstfruits (I Cor 15:20-23), and the Day of Atonement (Heb 9:7-12). The primary purpose of these and other festivals was to foreshadow the work of Christ, not reflect the agricultural experience of Israel in the Promised Land.

With regard to the ancient anachronistic view of Israel's calendar and the agricultural basis of the festivals, parts I and II of *The Liturgy of Creation* make two general hermeneutical errors:

The argument begins with the primary experience of agriculture in Israel, which gave rise to the liturgical calendar, resulting in the stylized narration of events in Scripture. This is the exact opposite order of origination and influence. LeFebvre's thesis would also imply (although it is not stated) a rejection of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, and the assumption that the legislation given at Sinai was actually crafted much later than Israel's entry into the Promised Land.

Numerous Biblical examples offered to support this thesis do not actually do so. The evidence is often stretched to make it fit, with many broad and unprovable assumptions.

The Theological Problems of *TLoC*

Having examined the hermeneutical problems related to *TLoC*, we turn to the theological problems. However, before talking about problems we wish to affirm something that LeFebvre has drawn to the reader's attention. He is a pastor with a concern that the Lord's Day might be honored by God's people. What is more, he clearly demonstrates through his research that the seventh day of creation is the area wherein scholars and the church are lacking in concern, no matter which side of the proverbial aisle one happens to be on in the debate of origins. We appreciate and share LeFebvre's concern and applaud his courage in bringing this dearth to the attention of the academy and the church.

Nevertheless, there are three serious theological disagreements that must be pointed out.

1) Asserting the Bible Upholds Error as Truth

⁶⁹ John R. Sittema, *Meeting Jesus at the Feast: Israel's Festivals and the Gospel* (Grandville: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2010), 11.

The first point takes up the idea of anthropomorphism and the cultural worldview found within the text itself. This is perhaps related more to hermeneutics than theology, but just as theology spilled over into hermeneutics in our last section so too will hermeneutics overflow into this section. According to LeFebvre, when we approach Genesis 1:1-2:3 we must utilize standard principles of interpretation “including sensitivity to anthropomorphized presentations of God and culturally situated worldviews.”⁷⁰ One wonders why LeFebvre has chosen to group these two aspects together.

For example, according to LeFebvre, the plain reading of the text provides the reader with an “anthropomorphized portrait of God”, but also with a worldview that is true and consistent with “the cultural attainments of the peoples to whom he spoke.”⁷¹ Here we find LeFebvre bringing anthropomorphic language together with culture and worldview related interpretation. For LeFebvre, the reason for joining these two elements is somewhat obvious. There is condescension required with regard to both anthropomorphism and culturally conditioned worldviews. In other words, just as God must stoop to reveal himself to his creation, so too must we stoop in order to understand a culturally conditioned worldview so foreign to our own. The parallel is certainly striking. However, there is a problem in terms of its application.

For example, theologically we understand the implications of the Latin phrase, *Finitum non possit capere infinitum* (the finite cannot grasp or contain the infinite), and therefore we speak of archetype and ectype theology. Archetype theology is that knowledge of God which is found in the infinite God alone, while ectype theology is God’s accommodated self-revelation to finite man in general and special revelation. The inference should be clear. Ectype theology is true but accommodated knowledge and, by implication, anthropomorphic language expresses something true about God in a way adapted to human understanding.

However, the comparison breaks down when we compare anthropomorphism to culturally situated worldviews. Whereas anthropomorphic language about God is true but accommodated knowledge, culturally situated beliefs that are part of existing ancient worldviews may be false. According to LeFebvre, the Biblical authors may adhere to these false views and teach them as true. Consequently, the interpreter must condescend to these worldviews if he is to rightly interpret the Scripture. In other words, he must discern when the Biblical writer is teaching a culturally situated idea that is false. For instance, LeFebvre posits that the Psalmist in Psalm 121 “prays for protection from being ‘moonstruck’ or psychologically affected by the moon, a fictitious condition to which moderns do not hold.”⁷² Peter wrongly, according to modern science, “invokes the period theory of humors, diagnosing Simon the Magician’s greed as an imbalance of ‘gall of bitterness ... in his blood (Acts 8:23).”⁷³ The point that LeFebvre seems to be attempting to establish is that the Bible can and does teach error as if it were truth. However, argues LeFebvre, these errors are not a problem so long as the writer in the culturally situated

⁷⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁷¹ Ibid., 122.

⁷² Ibid., 122.

⁷³ Ibid., 123

ancient worldview thought them to be true. Nevertheless, they become problems for the interpreter when he does not recognize them for what they are.

However, this is contrary to an orthodox view of the inspiration of Scripture. According to Edward J. Young, this position is a failure “to appreciate the fact that the Bible is a revelation from God.”⁷⁴ What is more, LeFebvre fails to remember what Young makes clear that when

[asserting] that the Bible is infallible, we are not basing this infallibility upon the knowledge of the human writers of Scripture. It may be that Moses, Isaiah, John and Paul were all men whose views of astronomy are today outmoded. Probably they held opinions on many other matters which would now be regarded as out of date. The Bible, however, is not simply the work of Moses and Isaiah, John and Paul. If it were, what a jumble of confusion and error it would be! It might then be little better than the works of other great men of antiquity. The Bible, however, is the revelation of God.⁷⁵

What Young is reminding us is a truth that is as simple as it is profound. All that Scripture “teaches is of unimpeachable, absolute authority, and cannot be contravened, contradicted, or gainsaid. Scripture is unfailing, incapable of proving false, erroneous, or mistaken,” because it is a revelation from God.⁷⁶ LeFebvre is correct when he continually reminds us that, “There is no effort anywhere in Scripture to lift God’s people out of their period understanding of (what we now call) the sciences.”⁷⁷ What is more, LeFebvre argues that for God to deal with people according to their own cultural understanding “is not a mark of imperfection in God’s word.”⁷⁸ However, LeFebvre fails to uphold the possibility of God’s keeping his inspired writers from teaching as truth the errors of their culturally situated worldviews. If he did not keep them from error, it is hard to see how the Bible could be anything but imperfect. In any other situation, error taught as truth is anything but perfect.

2) A Lack of Clarity in Placing the Phenomenon of Scripture over the Doctrine of Scripture

The second issue has to do with the distinction between the phenomena and the doctrine of Scripture. The phenomena of the Bible are things like cultural attainments of the ancient period, the physical worldview, and the science of the ancient culture, to name a few. However, the doctrine of Scripture is the product of Biblical theology.⁷⁹ In other words, “[If] men will really ask, not, ‘What do the creeds teach? What do the theologians say? What is the authority of the Church? but what does the Bible itself teach us? ... it is to the doctrine of verbal inspiration ...

⁷⁴ Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), 102.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁷ LeFebvre, 122. “As John Walton notes, ‘Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture’” (p. 122). “The Genesis creation account is a narrative, but is historically situated narrative like all other biblical narratives” (p. 124). “God consistently speaks within the cultural understanding of the audience” (p. 131). “However, I write with a commitment to listen to the Scriptures for what they say, even when it condescends to speak within the physical worldview of its ancient audience” (p. 149).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 123.

⁷⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948), 179.

that they must come.”⁸⁰ For men like Warfield, priority must be placed on the doctrine of Scripture. Or, to put it differently, one cannot allow the phenomena of Scripture to inform the doctrine of Scripture.

At best, LeFebvre is unclear as to whether the phenomena or the doctrine has the place of priority in his exposition and, at worst, seems to lean toward prioritizing the Scripture’s phenomena. For example, LeFebvre says, “However, I write with a commitment to listen to the Scriptures for what they say, even when it condescends to speak within the physical worldview of its ancient audience”⁸¹ LeFebvre illustrates this commitment in an excursus in chapter nine. LeFebvre says, “It is not surprising that the creation narrative speaks within the cosmology of the day. It would surprise us if Genesis introduced twenty-first century ... cosmological insights.”⁸² Now, in order to help the reader understand, LeFebvre says that the Holy Spirit throughout the Scripture speaks in the “cultural constructs of their day.”⁸³ LeFebvre then gives the example of the parable of Lazarus from the New Testament. After dismissing popular notions as to what Lazarus’s appearance before Abraham means, LeFebvre tells us, “It was a popular notion in late Second Temple Judaism that the dead entered two sides of the same temporary location until the final judgment.”⁸⁴ Thus, says LeFebvre, the details of this parable “are taken from Jewish beliefs” which are preserved in the works of Second Temple Judaism.⁸⁵ What is more, according to LeFebvre, the creation week is similar. Both narratives employ “the perceptions of the period for the setting of the story.”⁸⁶

This is a problematic hermeneutical and theological method, because it argues that we are unable to understand, in this case, what Luke really said without first knowing what Second Temple Judaism teaches about the afterlife. In other words, this view makes the texts of Second Temple Judaism more basic than the Scriptures.⁸⁷ To put it differently, in this scenario, the phenomena are used to judge the teaching of Scripture, which LeFebvre consistently does throughout *TLoC*. Whenever a method of Scripture interpretation displaces the Scripture as the *principia*, we must reject that method.

3) A Support of Theistic Evolution that Ultimately Confuses Key Tenets of the Bible’s Account of Creation and the Fall

The third issue of concern is that of evolution. Before addressing this particular concern we want to state clearly two key clarifications. First, our concern is not essentially with LeFebvre’s framework view of creation.⁸⁸ We recognize that within the RPCNA there is an allowable spectrum of belief regarding one’s view of the creation account *with respect to length of time*. However, our concern is that LeFebvre goes beyond an older earth position to the promotion of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ LeFebvre, 149.

⁸² Ibid., 161.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ This is the hermeneutical method employed by advocates of the New Perspective on Paul.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 7.

the theistic evolutionary viewpoint, with its subsequent positions regarding Adam and mankind, that is not an allowable view within the RPCNA.⁸⁹ Second, the hermeneutical concerns given above give rise to theological issues in their implications. For, as we now address and demonstrate, LeFebvre, though clearly stating his views do not teach evolution, nevertheless leaves the reader with the clear impression that he is at least promoting it and claiming that the Bible's rendering of the creation account is unaffected by it.

In the chapter "A Calendar for Sabbath, Not Science," LeFebvre initially states, "The interpretation of the creation narrative that I have commended neither teaches evolution nor denies its probability."⁹⁰ He goes on to say, "The Bible neither affirms nor denies evolution as a natural process."⁹¹ This position leads LeFebvre to affirm two points. First, he seems to argue that since the modern era has liberated the Bible from being a science textbook, Christians are free to pursue scientific questions through the tools of science.⁹² Thus, he says that the Bible was neither given "for training in science" nor should it "be used to determine the age of the universe."⁹³ Second, hinting at the direction of this freedom, LeFebvre contends that "the current consensus from scientific study points to the operation of evolution over long eons of time."⁹⁴ And "Evolution happens to be one of the most profound scientific insights of the modern world."⁹⁵

Perhaps a word of caution needs to be added in light of what LeFebvre has written. The Bible may not be a science text. The Bible does not claim to be one. However, if and when the Bible speaks to some aspect of the physical universe, it cannot and does not err in doing so. Whatever fact it chooses to address in whatever limited way that it does we must affirm that what it says about those facts is absolutely in accord with the truth, because the Bible is the infallible and inerrant revelation of God. As the Reformed Presbyterian Testimony states, "We reject the view that the Bible is only partially inspired, that inspiration pertains only to 'revelational' matters, or 'saving' truth, or that the Bible as originally given contains any inaccuracy in fact or history."⁹⁶

Along with this view of origins, there is a concern regarding LeFebvre's view of Adam. LeFebvre speaks of Adam as a historical figure in the Bible's first chapter. Yet it is his "desire to

⁸⁹ Reformed Presbyterian Testimony (RPT) 4.3, "The theory of evolution which assumes that chance happenings are an explanation of the origin and development of matter and living things is unscriptural. God created various kinds of living forms with tremendous potential for variation. The increase of varieties which has occurred is within genetic limitations provided at creation. Gen. 1:11, 20, 27; Gen. 2:2."

⁹⁰ LeFebvre, 201.

⁹¹ Ibid., 202.

⁹² Ibid., 200-201.

⁹³ Ibid., 201.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 202. LeFebvre has published on *Biologos*

(<https://biologos.org/articles/cracking-the-code-of-cadence-the-genre-of-genesis>) which is a site that believes "that the diversity and interrelation of all life on earth are best explained by the God-ordained process of evolution with common descent. Thus, evolution is not in opposition to God, but a means by which God providentially achieves his purposes. Therefore, we reject ideologies that claim that evolution is a purposeless process or that evolution replaces God."

⁹⁶ RPT 1.13.

commend a different interpretation of this beautiful opening chapter of the Bible.”⁹⁷ In *TLoC*, LeFebvre argues that Genesis 1:27 “has royal overtones.”⁹⁸ Moreover, he argues, “It was typically the kings of the ancient lands who received the designation ‘son’ and ‘image bearer’ of the nation’s deity.”⁹⁹ The title image bearer is not about physical likeness, contends LeFebvre, rather it “identifies the king’s duty to reveal heaven’s righteousness to his land,” which is why “the title is typically assigned to kings.”¹⁰⁰ Though kingly language regarding Adam is consistent with covenantal theology, which has traditionally viewed Adam as God’s vice-regent, something more than this Reformed understanding appears to be meant here by LeFebvre, as will now be demonstrated.

For LeFebvre contends that the use of the words “male” and “female” in Genesis 1:27 “anticipates not only marriage but family and community more broadly” and “the expectation of an entire race, not merely of human beings but of human societies.”¹⁰¹ His reason is that “image bearing is not something humans fulfill in isolation from one another.”¹⁰² Thus, in stating that, “The phrase *male and female* anticipates not only marriage but family and community more broadly”, *TLoC* does not explicitly affirm from this text that Adam was literally the first human to be created and Eve after him. Yet the Confessional Standards of Westminster tell us that “after God had made all other creatures”, he made Adam also.¹⁰³ The Confession clearly teaches that Adam and Eve were our first parents and the progenitors of the whole human race.¹⁰⁴

The reason for raising this concern about LeFebvre’s failure to affirm the Confession’s position on Adam as humanity’s progenitor in *TLoC* is explained by a paper he published in 2018 in the *Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology*. There he wrote,

In this paper, I will argue that the Eden narrative presents a more narrow topic. Adam is introduced as humanity’s first father, not in his reproductive capacity but in his royal appointment. The thesis of this paper is that the Eden narrative introduces Adam as humankind’s first king, and the narrative is an etiology of kingship with only tangential relevance at best to the question of humankind’s biological origins. Consequently, current genetic findings have no bearings on the question of Adam’s historicity. He was a real person who was appointed by God as humanity’s first universal king, but—as we will examine in this paper — the Genesis text does not actually require that Adam was the sole progenitor of all subsequent human beings.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ LeFebvre, *The Liturgy of Creation*, 178.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ WCF 4.1; WLC Q 17.

¹⁰⁴ WCF 6.1.

¹⁰⁵ Michael LeFebvre, “Adam Reigns in Eden: Genesis and the Origins of Kingship” (*Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology* 5.2 (2018), 26-27. LeFebvre’s view is similar to that of N. T. Wright’s found in his book *Surprised by Scripture* (HarperOne, 2014). Wright says, “And it leads to my proposal: that just as God chose Israel from the rest of humankind for a special, strange, demanding vocation, so perhaps what Genesis is telling us is that God *chose one pair from the rest of early hominids for a special, strange, demanding vocation*. This pair (call them Adam and Eve

And again he writes, “He was a real person who was appointed by God as humanity’s first universal king, but — as we will examine in this paper — the Genesis text does not actually require that Adam was the sole progenitor of all subsequent human beings.”¹⁰⁶ What is more, LeFebvre suggests that the expression “from the dust” in Genesis 2:7 is not about Adam’s special creation, but a metaphor of his royal election.¹⁰⁷ Many other quotations could be cited from this paper. Yet these few are enough to substantiate that LeFebvre does not hold to the Confessional understanding that Adam and Eve were the progenitors of the human race, but instead that Adam was the first king selected from other existing hominids.¹⁰⁸

LeFebvre provides the same counsel in his article that he had provided in his book, saying, “But beyond that, Genesis is silent on the question of human biological origins. This means that Christians need not feel threatened by the findings of the biological and genetic sciences.”¹⁰⁹ Here again, LeFebvre attempts to help us not to be defensive in the face of scientific evidence that he believes fails to support the traditional teaching of Scripture. Yet LeFebvre has expended a good deal of effort to downplay the human race originating in Adam, and thus it is difficult to see how he is not promoting an evolutionary understanding.

LeFebvre attempts to enlist Benjamin B. Warfield as a potential ally in his position. However, the evidence is not all that clear as to where Warfield landed on the issue of evolution. Nevertheless, even if Warfield was open to the idea of an evolutionary process guided by God, he would not have agreed with LeFebvre’s view of Adam. On that point, Warfield’s view of Adam was as clear as his doctrine of Scripture. He wrote,

The assertion of the unity of the human race is embedded in the very structure of the Biblical narrative. The Biblical account of the origin of man (Genesis 1:26-28) is *an account of his origination in a single pair, who constituted humanity in its germ, and from whose fruitfulness and multiplication all the earth has been replenished*. Therefore the first man was called Adam, Man, and the first woman, Eve, “because she was the mother of all living” (Gen 3:20).¹¹⁰

And again,

[It] would be truer to say that the whole doctrinal structure of the Bible account of redemption is founded on its assumption that the race of man is one organic whole, and

if you like) were to be representatives of the whole human race, the ones in whom God’s purpose to make the whole world a place of delight and joy and order, eventually colonizing the whole creation, was to be taken forward. God the creator put into their hands the fragile task of being image bearers. If they fail, they will bring the whole purpose for the wider creation, including all the non chosen hominids, down with them. They are supposed to be the life bringers, and if they fail in their task the death that is already endemic in the world as it is will engulf them as well” (pp. 37-38).

¹⁰⁶ LeFebvre, “Adam Reigns in Eden: Genesis and the Origins of Kingship”, 27.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 33.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 45.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 56.

¹¹⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1968), 259.

may be dealt with as such. It is because all are one in Adam that in the matter of sin there is no difference . . . The unity of the old man in Adam is the postulate of the unity of the new man in Christ.¹¹¹

Here then is where key tenets of the creation account and fall become confused in LeFebvre's system of teaching. First, if Adam is not the progenitor of the human race, then the fullness of the federal headship of Adam as taught in classical covenantal theology is not established. For the clear genealogical accounts of Scripture, culminating in Luke 3, that establish Christ's human descent from Adam as the first man, not just as a kingly line, become distorted if indeed as referenced above that, "Genesis is silent on the question of human biological origins." Second, since the federal headship of Adam includes not only his kingship over mankind, but his lordship over the creation in all its fullness (Gen. 1:26-28), then man's vice-regency becomes compromised. Third, if pre-Adam hominids existed, then the doctrine of original sin as taught in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms loses its foundational basis. Speaking of Adam and Eve, the Confession states, "They being *the root of all mankind*, the guilt of this sin was imputed; and the same death in sin, and corrupted nature, conveyed to all their posterity descending from them by ordinary generation."¹¹² Romans 5:12 clearly states that "sin came into the world through one man", who is identified as Adam (Rom. 5:14). Fourth, the clear restoration of the creation by Christ as the Second Adam, which is a central theme of the eschatological viewpoint found in the Scriptures, would also lose clarity in this approach. Finally, the perspicuity of Scripture in its opening chapters becomes lost as covenantal, confessional truths that are so wisely woven together begin to unravel under this theological perspective. Though the reviewers are not claiming that LeFebvre is purposively promoting these errors, it is our belief that his approach to the creation account logically leads to them.

Concluding Thoughts

As we offer this extensive review, we do so with heavy hearts. We plead with our dear brother to take to heart our studied, prayerfully-offered concerns, and, regardless of the cost, be willing to set aside perspectives that are not helpful to the church. We plead with the church to be patient and careful with our brother as it engages him with respect to the teachings of his book. And we plead to the Lord for the peace of Jerusalem (Ps 122:6-9).

¹¹¹ Ibid., 261.

¹¹² WCF 6.3. See also, WLC Q. 22. *Did all mankind fall in that first transgression?* A. The covenant being made with Adam as a public person, not for himself only, but for his posterity, *all mankind descending from him by ordinary generation*, sinned in him, and fell with him in that first transgression.