

Ad Litteram: Some Dutch Reformed Theologians On The Creation Days*

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I. Introduction

One of the welcome results of the debate within contemporary American Presbyterianism over the length of the days in Gen 1 has been the publication of a number of interesting historical studies on the subject. Recent articles have surveyed the views of various theologians from the early church up to and including the period of the writing of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*.¹ A more recent theological tradition that has dealt extensively with the issue—and that, consequently, should be of particular interest to the current discussion—is late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Dutch Calvinism. Not only is a study of this theological tradition valuable in its own right, but it is also made especially necessary due to some serious misconceptions that exist concerning the views of some of its most famous theologians. In a recent publication, for example, it is stated that Geerhardus Vos defended the idea that the creation days were “literal” or “ordinary” days and, so it is claimed, that in this “he was holding the position of the orthodox Reformed scholars of the Netherlands, such as Aalders, as well as Kuyper and Bavinck.”² Another writer claims that “Vos, Bavinck, Kuyper... hold to a literal six day interpretation of Genesis 1.”³ Such statements give the unmistakable impression that these Dutch theologians would be in agreement with those today who affirm that the days of Gen 1 are to be understood as twenty-four hours in length. While this is probably

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true enough as far as Vos is concerned, with respect to Kuyper, Bavinck, and Aalders it is, quite simply, erroneous. If one actually consults their writings it is perfectly clear that they explicitly denied that some (or all) of the days of Gen 1 were “ordinary” ones, and this had significant implications for their views on the precise length of the days. This article will therefore attempt to set the record straight on these theologians, as well as to draw attention to some other important vo...

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