

A MISUNDERSTANDING OF CALVIN'S INTERPRETATION  
OF GENESIS 1:6-8 AND 1:5 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS  
FOR IDEAS OF ACCOMMODATION

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In his commentary on Genesis John Calvin had some interesting things to say about Gen 1:6-8.<sup>1</sup> We want to re-examine them, because there is a dispute about their meaning. In addition, we will examine a related problem concerning Gen 1:5. Both cases have implications for the doctrine of Scripture and the nature of “accommodation.” So they have more than historical interest.

In 2008 Kenton Sparks's book *God's Word in Human Words* included comments on Calvin's interpretation of Gen 1:6-8.<sup>2</sup> In my judgment, Sparks misunderstood Calvin. But Sparks used Calvin's remarks as a significant building-block on his way to constructing an overall approach to Scripture. Sparks's overall approach says that the Bible may incorporate erroneous ancient views about the cosmos—and errors of other kinds as well. Sparks claims that Calvin already thought in a similar way. I disagree both with Sparks's position and with his use of Calvin to support it.<sup>3</sup>

Recently I received a private correspondence from an evangelical scholar who repeated in his own words Sparks's misunderstanding of what Calvin said about Gen 1:6-8. He also directed me to Sparks's book (among other sources). I could see that other people were making the same mistake that Sparks made. So I believe it is time to set to rest this misreading of Calvin.

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (trans. John King; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 1:78-81 (*Corpus Reformatorum* 51:18-19).

<sup>2</sup> Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 235.

<sup>3</sup> On the broader issue of Calvin's views on biblical authority, see John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 49-52, 56-67. Note also the bibliography from p. 56 nn. 32 and 33, found on pp. 177-78, and the discussion of Calvin on Genesis on p. 61. For Calvin's views on “accommodation,” see Glenn S. Sunshine, “Accommodation in Calvin and Socinus: A Study of Contrasts” (M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1985); Clinton M. Ashley, “John Calvin's Utilization of the Principle of Accommodation and Its Continuing Significance for an Understanding of Biblical Language” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1972); Martin I. Klauber and Glenn S. Sunshine, “Jean-Alphonse Turretini on Biblical Accommodation: Calvinist or Socinian?,” *CTJ* 25 (1990): 7-27; and the further bibliography in *ibid.*, 9 n. 4.

## I. *Calvin and Sparks*

Let us begin with Calvin's exposition of Gen 1:6-8 and then compare it with that of Sparks. For a sense of context, it is worthwhile reading all of Calvin's remarks on Gen 1:6-8.<sup>4</sup> For convenience, we start with the most salient portion, which lies in the middle of his exposition:

Moses describes the special use of this expanse, "to divide the waters from the waters," from which words arises a great difficulty. For it appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heaven. Hence some resort to allegory, and philosophize concerning angels; but quite beside the purpose. For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world. He who would learn astronomy, and other recondite arts, let him go elsewhere. Here the Spirit of God would teach all men without exception; and therefore what Gregory declares falsely and in vain respecting statues and pictures is truly applicable to the history of the creation, namely, that it is the book of the unlearned. The things, therefore, which he relates, serve as the garniture of that theatre which he places before our eyes. Whence I conclude, that the waters here meant are such as the rude and unlearned may perceive. The assertion of some, that they embrace by faith what they have read concerning the waters above the heavens, notwithstanding their ignorance respecting them, is not in accordance with the design of Moses. And truly a longer inquiry into a matter open and manifest is superfluous. We see that the clouds suspended in the air, which threaten to fall upon our heads, yet leave us space to breathe. They who deny that this is effected by the wonderful providence of God, are vainly inflated with the folly of their own minds. We know, indeed, that the rain is naturally produced; but the deluge sufficiently shows how speedily we might be overwhelmed by the bursting of the clouds, unless the cataracts of heaven were closed by the hand of God.

In his book, Kenton Sparks quotes the middle part of this passage.<sup>5</sup> He then interprets Calvin as follows:

One should not, Calvin says, believe "by faith" that there are waters above the firmament when one knows good and well that this is not the case. Genesis merely accommodates itself to *the ancient view* that such waters existed.<sup>6</sup> (italics mine)

### 1. *Calvin's Meaning*

Sparks's interpretation misses widely what Calvin is saying. Sparks thinks that Calvin is saying that there are no waters above the firmament.<sup>7</sup> But this is directly contradicted by Calvin's repeated references to these very waters:

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:78-81.

<sup>5</sup> Sparks, *God's Word*, 235. Sparks's quotation begins with "For, to my mind," elides the sentence about Gregory, and ends with the sentence, "And truly a longer inquiry into a matter open and manifest is superfluous."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "... one knows good and well that this [that there are waters above the firmament] is not the case" (ibid.).

Whence I conclude, that *the waters here meant* are such as the rude and unlearned [i.e., ordinary people in Calvin's time as well as in ancient Israel] may perceive [i.e., the waters are something obvious, not something "recondite" as in astronomy].

We see that the *clouds* suspended in the air, which threaten to fall upon our heads, yet leave us space to breathe.

We know, indeed, that the *rain* is naturally produced; but the deluge [i.e., the flood of Noah] sufficiently shows how speedily we might be overwhelmed by the bursting of the *clouds*, unless the *cataracts of heaven* [a figurative reference to the water above] were closed by the hand of God. (italics mine in each case)

Calvin is saying that the water in the clouds is the "water above the expanse," and the lower air is the expanse.

The surrounding text in Calvin's commentary confirms that this is what Calvin has in mind. Before coming to the middle part of his exposition (already quoted), Calvin argues that the key Hebrew word *rakia*' ("firmament" or "expanse") includes the lower atmosphere:

Moreover, the word רַקִּיעַ (*rakia*) comprehends not only the whole region of the air, but whatever is open above us: as the word heaven is sometimes understood by the Latins. Thus the arrangement, as well of the heavens as of the lower atmosphere, is called רַקִּיעַ (*rakia*) without discrimination between them [i.e., between the heavens and the lower atmosphere], but sometimes the word signifies both together, sometimes one part only, as will appear more plainly in our progress [i.e., Calvin's discussion still to come]. I know not why the Greeks have chosen to render the word στερέωμα, which the Latins have imitated in the term *firmamentum*; for literally it means *expanse* [*expansio*].<sup>8</sup>

Calvin claims that the key word *rakia* ("expanse") can include both "the heavens" and "the lower atmosphere," but can also be used for "one part only." This claim paves the way for Calvin later on to interpret the "expanse" in Gen 1:6 as referring to the lower atmosphere, that is, the air separating the clouds from the earth.

After the middle part of the exposition that we quoted above, Calvin continues to explain:

Since, therefore, God has created the clouds, and assigned them a region above us [i.e., in the general region of the expanse], it ought not to be forgotten that they are restrained by the power of God, lest, gushing forth with sudden violence, they should swallow us up: and especially since no other barrier is opposed to them than the liquid and yielding air, which would easily give way unless this word [God's word of command given in Gen 1:6] prevailed, "Let there be an expanse between the waters."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:79. It should be noted that Calvin provides his own translation of the text of Gen 1:1-31. He renders רַקִּיעַ (*rakia*) variously: *extensio* ("extension," v. 6), *expansio* ("expanse, expansion," vv. 7, 8, 15, 17), and *firmamentum* ("firmament," v. 14) (*ibid.*, 1:67-68; *Corpus Reformatorum* 51:13). By contrast, the Latin Vulgate consistently uses *firmamentum*.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:80-81.

Here Calvin's final sentence uses the key word "expanse [*extensio*]" as part of its quotation of Gen 1:6. Calvin implies that God's word of command concerning the expanse causes the air not to "give way." Calvin thereby identifies the expanse with the air, which functions as a "barrier." He implies that this air, like a barrier, separates the waters below from the waters above the expanse. If the air did give way, the water from the clouds would be "gushing forth with sudden violence." Thus he identifies the clouds with the waters above the expanse, that is, with the waters that are above the "barrier" of the air.

This entire paragraph, be it noted, makes good sense in the light of Calvin's principle, "For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing is here [in Gen 1] treated of but the visible form of the world."<sup>10</sup> The clouds and the air are both observable. Calvin interprets Gen 1:6-8 as referring to them. A theoretically postulated, invisible, recondite body of "waters above the heaven" would be *out of accord* with the principle that Calvin thinks is operative throughout Gen 1. He therefore rejects such speculative views, even though they piously appeal to faith:

The assertion of some, that they embrace by faith what they have read concerning the waters above the heavens, notwithstanding their ignorance respecting them [an ignorance due to the fact that they have in mind waters that they believe to be some invisible body of which they have never had any experience], is not in accordance with the design of Moses [i.e., it does not match Moses' purpose to address "the rude and unlearned," and to confine himself to "the visible form of the world"].<sup>11</sup>

Calvin is rejecting a speculative construction in favor of one that says that Gen 1:6-8 is referring to "the visible form of the world," in this case to the air and the clouds.<sup>12</sup>

Calvin thinks that his meaning is what Moses intended ("the design of Moses"). Calvin, in his own view, is not making any alteration in meaning, as if hypothetically such an alteration were needed in the light of more modern knowledge. The meaning is the same for ancient Israelites and for Calvin himself. It has this stable function over time because the passage is discussing what is visible to all ("the rude and unlearned"). Calvin repeatedly indicates that Gen 1:6-8 is referring to perceivable aspects of the world, so that all people may grasp what is in view: "the *visible* form of the world"; "teach *all* men without exception"; "the book of the *unlearned*"; "he places before *our eyes*"; "such as the *rude and unlearned may perceive*"; "a matter *open and manifest*"; "We *see* that the clouds suspended in the air . . ."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 1:79. Compare John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.14.3: "Moses, in accommodation to the ignorance of the generality of men, does not in the history of the creation make mention of any other works of God than *those which meet our eye . . .*" (italics mine); cited in Klauber and Sunshine, "Turretini," 10.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:80.

<sup>12</sup> So also Scott M. Manetsch, "Problems with the Patriarchs: John Calvin's Interpretation of Difficult Passages in Genesis," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 1-21, with respect to the same passage (11-13).

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:79-80.

## 2. *A Further Puzzle*

There remains one part of Calvin's exposition that might still puzzle modern readers. He says, "For it appears opposed to common sense, and quite incredible, that there should be waters above the heaven."<sup>14</sup> Does Calvin here repudiate the existence of "waters above the heaven," because it is "opposed to common sense"? No. To understand what Calvin is saying, it is best to proceed sentence by sentence. Calvin's sentence about "common sense" is immediately preceded by words that Calvin uses to introduce to his readers a "difficulty": "from which words arises a great difficulty." At this comparatively early point in his exposition, he is preparing to discuss why interpreters perceive a difficulty. These other interpreters—not he—cannot figure out what these waters might be, in a way that would agree with common sense.<sup>15</sup> Calvin does not directly say so, but their difficulty involves the fact that they understand "the heaven" (i.e., the expanse) to mean high heaven. Calvin does not so understand it. Earlier in his exposition, Calvin has already begun to expound this part of his view by explaining the flexibility of the use of *rakia* (the "expanse"). The Hebrew word for "expanse" can refer to the air, and so Calvin has avoided the difficulty that confronts these other interpreters.

Following his sentence about "common sense," Calvin next explains the routes to which these other interpreters resort in order to deal with the difficulty that they have: "Hence some resort to allegory, and philosophize concerning angels; but quite beside the purpose." Calvin rejects these interpretations with the words, "quite beside the purpose." Why are these routes "beside the purpose"? Calvin explains it in the next sentence: "For, to my mind, this is a certain principle, that nothing is here treated of but the visible form of the world." Here Calvin reveals his own stance. The other interpreters have gone astray into speculations because they suppose that the "waters above the heaven" must refer to something invisible or recondite. If, instead, we realize that this and other expressions in Gen 1 refer to things that are observable, the difficulties dissolve. And indeed, in the subsequent discussion Calvin does dissolve them, at least to his own satisfaction.

Thus, in the key sentence about "common sense," Calvin is *not* repudiating the existence of "the waters above the heaven." Rather, he is posing an *apparent* difficulty. This difficulty has steered other interpreters into allegory. But Calvin himself thinks that the solution to the difficulty can be found once we see that Gen 1:6 is talking about "the visible form of the world." We then see that the text is talking about water in the clouds, separated from the earth by the air.

Not everyone will agree with every detail in Calvin's interpretation. But his interpretation makes good sense, given Calvin's starting orientation, his assumptions about "the design of Moses," his understanding of the "expanse," and his assumptions about the divine authority of Scripture.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:79.

<sup>15</sup> Manetsch, "Problems," 11.

### 3. *Sparks's Misunderstanding*

Sparks, by contrast, introduces a profound disjunction between two distinct times, namely, the time of Calvin and the time during which there prevailed what Sparks calls "the ancient view." According to Sparks, "the ancient view" is one to which "Genesis merely accommodates itself." According to Sparks, Calvin as a modern interpreter knowingly deviates from the ancient view, because he "knows good and well that this is not the case."<sup>16</sup> But Sparks is mistaken. His disjunction between two times is completely foreign to Calvin's words. In fact, it contradicts what Calvin says about "the design of Moses," which is to speak about clouds, rain, and the lower atmosphere. There is no distinct "ancient view" in Calvin's thinking. Sparks has unconsciously read it in.

How did Sparks fall into this mistake? We do not know. Perhaps he thinks he knows what this ancient view is and is convinced that we can no longer hold to it.<sup>17</sup> Sparks himself would doubtless say, "One should not . . . believe 'by faith' that there are waters above the firmament when one knows good and well that this is not the case." He attributes his own thought to Calvin. But Calvin is saying almost exactly the opposite, namely, that in interpreting Gen 1:6-8 one must determine a meaning for "waters above the expanse" that is in accord with Moses' design. Then one must appreciate how true it is and to what practical lessons it leads.<sup>18</sup> Calvin thinks that one should believe what Moses describes. Sparks says that one should not (because "one knows good and well that this is not the case"). Sparks thinks that there are no waters above the firmament. Calvin thinks that there are, and identifies the waters as the rain water in the clouds.

### 4. *Sparks's Treatment of Time (Gen 1:5)*

As long as we are considering Calvin in relation to Sparks's interpretation of him, we should consider a second claim about Calvin that Sparks introduces on the same page as the first. Sparks says:

Calvin similarly argued that accommodation was at work in the chronological system used to enumerate the various creation days of Genesis 1. Because the text reflects an accommodation to the ancient view of time, says Calvin, "It is useless to dispute whether this is the best and legitimate order or not." In other words, for Calvin, accommodation was a useful interpretive tool because it made irrelevant in such cases any questions about the Bible's correctness.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Sparks, *God's Word*, 235.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>18</sup> "Having established the correct interpretation of Gen 1:6, Calvin the preacher finally proceeds to application" (Manetsch, "Problems," 12).

<sup>19</sup> Sparks, *God's Word*, 235.

In the middle of this paragraph Sparks offers us a direct quote from Calvin's words. Sparks's footnote indicates that Calvin's words come from pp. 1:79-80 of his commentary on Genesis.<sup>20</sup> The words actually come from p. 1:77. My English edition of Calvin's commentary has slightly different wording: "It is to no purpose to dispute whether this be the best and the legitimate order or not."

### 5. *Calvin's Meaning for Genesis 1:5*

What is at issue here? It is important to discern Calvin's meaning because there is more than one possible understanding of "accommodation."

To understand Calvin, we must consider the larger context. Calvin is discussing Gen 1:5, with its mention of the evening and the morning, day one. He says:

What Moses says [in Gen 1:5], however, admits a double interpretation; either that this was the evening and morning belonging to the first day, or that the first day consisted of the evening and the morning. Whichever interpretation be chosen, it makes no difference in the sense, for he simply understands the day to have been made up of two parts. Further, he begins the day, according to the custom of his nation [i.e., Israel], with the evening. *It is to no purpose to dispute whether this [i.e., beginning the day at evening] be the best and the legitimate order or not. . . .* Although Moses did not intend here to prescribe a rule which it would be criminal to violate; yet (as we have now said) he accommodated his discourse to the received custom [of the Jews]. Wherefore, as the Jews foolishly condemn all the reckonings of other people, as if God had sanctioned this alone [i.e., that the reckoning of the beginning of a day *must* begin with evening]; so again are they equally foolish who contend that this mode of reckoning [i.e., the Jewish way of beginning with evening], which Moses approves, is preposterous.<sup>21</sup> (italics mine)

In part, Calvin is discussing the significance of the word order in Gen 1:5: "evening," then "morning." The last sentence in the quoted material is especially illuminating. It makes it clear that Calvin is aware of a dispute. Some of the Jews insist that their way of reckoning, which begins the day at evening, is the only proper ("sanctioned") way. Others reject this Jewish way as "preposterous," thereby impugning what "Moses approves." Calvin maintains that either way is OK. This clarifies what he means when he says earlier, "It is to no purpose to *dispute* whether this [the Jewish way] be the best and the legitimate order or not."

Calvin also uses the word *accommodated* at one point: Moses "accommodated [*accommodavit*] his discourse to the received custom." This use of the word is about as innocuous as it can be. Moses wrote in a way that took into account "received custom"—the normal way that Jews expressed themselves.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., n. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *First Book of Moses*, 1:77-78.

## 6. *Sparks's Explication*

Now we turn to Sparks's remarks on Calvin. His remarks have some peculiarities. To begin with, he uses the expression "the ancient view of time." This expression makes it sound as if there was only one ancient view. But Calvin does not say this. He discusses more narrowly how the Jews treated the description of a day. He makes no claim that their way was universal in ancient times, and he mentions "all the reckonings of other people." The word "all" (*omnes*) suggests that he may be including various ancient people as well as those of his own time. In addition, he is aware that some people think that the Jewish way is "preposterous." To say the least, he is aware of multiple points of view here.

For Calvin, there is no question of one way being the "correct" way. Rather, it would be possible to begin with the morning, or with midnight, as well as with the evening. Calvin does not really need an elaborate theory of accommodation to achieve this result. He happens to use the word *accommodated*, but the point would be plain even without it. Different people may have different customary ways of looking at the sequence of daylight and nighttime. More than one may serve, without generating a dispute. "It is to no purpose to dispute."

Unfortunately, it is easy for a reader of Sparks's comments to misunderstand the implications of what Calvin is saying. Sparks speaks about "the chronological system used to enumerate the various creation days of Genesis 1." In this system, says Sparks, Calvin "argued that accommodation was at work." A reader who just listens to Sparks but does not read through Calvin's entire discussion could easily believe that Calvin views *the entire system of a sequence of six days* as an "accommodation." As it is, all Calvin is actually saying is that the repeated refrain, "and there was evening and there was morning," is in line with a Jewish way of reckoning, in which the commencement of a day comes at evening.

Sparks's quote from Calvin also includes the key expression, "the best and legitimate order." Apart from a larger context, this expression can easily be misunderstood. Modern interpreters are likely to think that it refers to the chronological order of events that occur in the creation week, because that is one area now in dispute. But the word "order" in Calvin has a very different reference, namely, to whether one uses the order evening-morning or morning-evening or even midnight-to-midnight in counting one day. He is not discussing the chronological order of *events*. He is discussing what one chooses to call the "beginning" of a daily cycle. The chronological sequence is the same for everyone: dawn, morning, noon, afternoon, evening, night, repeated in a cycle. Calvin is implying that any point at which one chooses to commence the cycle is legitimate.

## 7. *Calvin's Comments on the System of Six Days*

Right after the discussion concerning evenings and mornings, Calvin does comment on the sequence of six days. Calvin rejects the view that "the world was made in a moment." Instead, he says, "Let us rather conclude that God himself



took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating [*temperaret*] his works to the capacity of men.”<sup>22</sup>

Here again we meet language concerning accommodation. But note what it means. Calvin implies that God *could have* made the world “in a moment.” But instead, he “took the space of six days.” Calvin clearly believes that the words in Gen 1 describe a series of works that took six days. What Calvin calls an accommodation is the decision on God’s part to do it in this way, that is, to spread his works over “the space of six days.” God did so, Calvin thinks, because a process spread over time would be easier for human beings to take in and digest. It suited “the capacity of men.” Hence, the “accommodation” lies in the fact that God spreads out his works in time, *not* in the language in Gen 1 describing those works.

Modern scholars, by contrast, are greatly interested in the disputes about the chronological length of the days of Gen 1, and whether the various works described are given in chronological order. For the sake of reconciliation with mainstream accounts in modern science, some modern interpreters would like to say that God “accommodated” the *language* of Gen 1 to a framework of six days, even though the works being described belong to an entirely different order of time.<sup>23</sup>

Again, whether a modern interpreter agrees with Calvin is not my point. My point is that Calvin’s approach should be recognized for what it is. In affirming “the space of six days,” Calvin is advocating nearly the opposite to the point of view that alleges that a radical kind of “accommodation” is taking place in the *language* about six days. Calvin thinks that the language in Gen 1 actually does describe six days of God’s works, but accommodation takes place in the way God accomplishes *the works* themselves. If we translate it anachronistically into modern terms, we could almost say that Calvin is talking about accommodation in what science researches (the works), while modern interpreters are talking about an alleged “accommodation” in the language—the verbal deposit in Gen 1. According to these modern interpreters, the wording in Gen 1 sets forth a literary framework that talks about the six days for the purpose of accommodating the description to a graspable framework, but Gen 1 refers to events that belong to another order of time.<sup>24</sup> Or, going a step further, modern interpreters

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:78.

<sup>23</sup> Sparks’s own view of Calvin’s remarks on Gen 1:5 is not clear to me. It is possible that Sparks has misunderstood Calvin. In the case of Gen 1:5, however, it seems to me more likely that Sparks has understood Calvin’s narrow focus on the dispute over when a day begins. At the same time, he has worded his description in such a way as to suggest broader implications. But a description that tries simultaneously to address Calvin’s meaning and broader implications easily becomes unclear about both. In addition, it fails to establish whether the one leads to the other. In fact, Calvin’s own focused treatment of Jewish custom does not provide grounds for the broad re-interpretive treatment that some modern interpreters would like to apply to the *whole system* of chronology of six days. Quite the contrary.

<sup>24</sup> I do not intend here to criticize every form of the framework hypothesis for Gen 1 (for my evaluation of the framework view, see Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach*

may say that the entire scheme of events, as well as the framework of six days, is a literary invention useful (as an “accommodation”) in describing God as the ground for the existence of the world.

## II. Meanings of “Accommodation”

Distinct kinds of “accommodation” are quite different, and it does not help to roll all the uses together. In particular, we obscure an important dispute if in discussing Gen 1:5 we do not distinguish a careful use of language according to “received custom” (Calvin) from a global reorganization of chronological order (modern desire). Likewise, earlier in this article we uncovered two vastly different approaches to Gen 1:6-8. Calvin attempts to interpret the language of Gen 1:6-8 as a *true* description of “the visible form of the world.” By contrast, Sparks depreciates the same biblical language because it allegedly represents a *mistaken* “ancient view”: he says, “Genesis merely accommodates itself to the ancient view that such waters existed.”<sup>25</sup>

Both of these strategems, Calvin’s and Sparks’s, have been described with the word *accommodation*. But in Calvin, God accommodates to the needs of his addressees by describing the visible form of the world and thereby making sure that his communication makes sense to ordinary people (“the unlearned”). “Accommodation” in this sense serves the truth by expressing the truth in an accessible manner. In Sparks’s view, God allegedly “accommodates” erroneous ancient views by incorporating them into the text that he endorses. “Accommodation” in this second sense serves confusion. Many in our day think there is no real alternative to such confusion, because of the limitations of language and culture that God confronts.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, the very places where Sparks appeals to Calvin count against this pessimistic view of communication. Even if Calvin is wrong in some details, he at least shows how a clear meaning *could* be communicated from God to man, namely, by talking about the observable world in ordinary ways.

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[Wheaton: Crossway, 2006], 143-47, 341-45). Rather, I am merely saying that Calvin’s approach to Gen 1:5 cannot be used to launch a framework view. Moreover, we should distinguish between (1) a dismissal of textual details on the basis of a loose general principle of “accommodation” and (2) a serious engagement with the details, on the basis of which an interpreter tries to argue in favor of a framework view as Moses’ meaning.

<sup>25</sup> Sparks, *God’s Word*, 235.

<sup>26</sup> A lot of assumptions lie behind postmodern conceptions of “limitation” with respect to language, culture, and human psychology. See Vern S. Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012).