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OUTLINE 1

The Spirit and Creation

“... and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” *Genesis 1:2b*

Whenever the work of the Holy Spirit comes up for discussion, we immediately think of what he does in the hearts and lives of believers. We connect the Holy Spirit with regeneration and renewal of life. It is remarkable however, that already on the first page of the Bible we see the Holy Spirit come to the fore in quite a different framework. Genesis 1 proclaims to us God’s wonderful work of creation. About the creation of heaven and earth we read that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters. This means that the Holy Spirit is involved in creation and that his work *includes more* than the regeneration and renewing of God’s children.

It is remarkable that the relationship between the Spirit and creation has received little attention in Christian thought about the Holy Spirit and his work. In the confessions of the church the emphasis is on his sanctifying and renewing activity. In Lord’s Day 8 of the Heidelberg Catechism the church speaks about the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. In Lord’s Day 20 we confess that the Holy Spirit makes us partakers of Christ and all his benefits and that he comforts us. Article 9 of the Belgic Confession calls the Holy Spirit our Sanctifier because he dwells in our hearts. Nowhere, however, do our confessions speak in so many words about the work of the Holy Spirit in *creation*. Of all the Reformed Confessions of the 16th century, the Hungarian Confession is the only one that says that the Holy Spirit has shown his infinite power and activity already from the beginning of the world in the creation and preservation of all creatures.

That the work of the Holy Spirit received all the emphasis in the Reformed Confessions is probably connected with the struggle the Reformation had against Rome and the Anabaptists in the 16th century. The controversy was precisely on the point of the way man receives salvation.

Nevertheless, if we want to honor the Holy Spirit in all his work, we may not forget his active work in creation. Scripture does not record Genesis 1:2 without reason. We have to honor also the Holy Spirit as the Creator. Creation is the work of the Triune God. Scripture teaches us that the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit accomplished this great work.

The author of Genesis tells us first about the condition of the earth, after God had created heaven and earth. The word "earth" is emphatically mentioned first. In the rest of Genesis 1 the author announces how the LORD God prepared the earth as a dwelling place for man. Before man could take up residence on this earth, many things had to take place yet. For the earth was without form and empty and darkness was over the surface of the deep.

The expression "formless and empty" intensifies the word "empty." It is impossible at this point for man to live there. The earth is still not inhabitable. It is all formless and empty. Light that is indispensable for life is totally absent. An impenetrable darkness lies over the surface of the deep. God has not yet separated the waters from the dry land. The whole earth is still covered with a flood of water, enveloped in darkness.

The LORD God, however, is already busy with this uninhabitable earth! Its formlessness and emptiness are not the end. God wants to make the earth into a glorious place for man to live.

Our text shows that the LORD God is already busy with the uninhabitable earth: "and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." Perhaps "and" can also be rendered "but." Then our text shows a certain contrast: the earth was still uninhabitable, without form and empty, but the Spirit of God was hovering over this earth.