

The Confessions of a Disappointed Young-Earther

I sometimes describe myself as a “disappointed young-earther.” By that I mean I started out holding to the young-earth position, but the shortcomings of most of the YEC arguments and the shenanigans of certain YEC proponents forced me to the old-earth position.

During the late 1970’s, I attended college at Tennessee Temple University in Chattanooga, TN. At that time the fundamentalist movement was at a high-water mark among Baptists, and TTU enjoyed a record number of students. It was there that I was introduced to Whitcomb and Morris’ *The Genesis Flood*. In those days their project was called “scientific creationism.”

John Whitcomb and Henry Morris published *The Genesis Flood* in 1961. They intended the work to be a response to Bernard Ramm, who in 1954 had published a work arguing that Noah’s Deluge was a local catastrophe. Borrowing heavily from George McCready Price (1870-1963), a Seventh-Day Adventist author, Whitcomb and Morris contended that the flood of Noah’s day accounts for practically all the geological record. By any standard, the book was a publishing success with over 300,000 copies sold. *The Genesis Flood* launched the modern young-earth creationism (YEC) movement. Let us remember that prior to 1961, the majority of fundamentalist and evangelical leaders held to some version of old-earth creationism (OEC).¹ It would be difficult to exaggerate the influence Whitcomb and Morris’ book had on me. My original copy was dog-eared and underlined. They were dedicated to upholding the authority of

¹ B. B. Warfield, who coined the term “inerrancy of Scripture,” held to a form of theistic evolution. R. A. Torrey, who helped found Moody Bible Institute and BIOLA and who edited *The Fundamentals* (from which we get our term “Fundamentalist”) adhered to the gap theory. When Harry Rimmer and W. B. Riley debated about the proper interpretation of Gen 1 neither man argued for a young earth. Even William Jennings Bryan held to a day-age interpretation of the seven days of creation.

Scripture and the integrity of the Gospel. That resonated with me then and I affirm those commitments today.

The Main Arguments of *The Genesis Flood*

So when Whitcomb and Morris used the term “scientific creationism,” what did they mean? They meant that an assessment of the scientific evidence which was not biased by anti-theistic presuppositions would objectively conclude that the earth is only a few thousand years old. We will look further at the nature and role of presuppositions later in the paper. Whitcomb and Morris’ argument can be broken down into six parts.

Opposition to Uniformitarianism: Uniformitarianism is the principle that the processes of today should be used to interpret the past. Applied to geology, it implies that the geological formations were formed gradually over immense periods of time. Whitcomb and Morris argued that the presupposition of uniformitarianism hopelessly biased modern geological theory so that geologists fail to see the clear evidences for the global catastrophe that occurred during Noah’s day.² They further contended that this current blindness on the part of the geological profession is a fulfillment of the apostle Peter’s prophecy of apostasy during the latter days (2 Peter 3:3-7).³ In this way, flood geology and young-earth creationism fit very well within the premillennial worldview of classic Dispensationalism which dominated evangelical thinking for much of the 20th century.

2nd Law of Thermodynamics as an Effect of the Curse: One of the most fundamental laws of nature is the second law of thermodynamics, otherwise known as entropy. It is the

² John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961), 130-42.

³ *Ibid.*, 451-54.

principle that nature has the tendency to move from a state of higher order to a lower state. In short, entropy is the phenomena of everything running down. Whitcomb and Morris interpreted the Genesis account to teach that the universe was originally created perfect: no death, decay, or deterioration. This, to them, does not seem to be compatible with entropy, so Whitcomb and Morris suggested that the second law came into effect when God cursed the earth for Adam's sake.⁴

The Canopy Theory: The creation account (Gen 1:6) speaks of God separating the waters above the firmament from the waters below the firmament. Whitcomb and Morris interpreted this to teach that God place a vapor canopy above the atmosphere.⁵ This canopy provided the waters that inundated the world during Noah's flood. Whitcomb and Morris argued that the vapor covering provided by the canopy created a very different environment for the pre-flood world from that of the present world.⁶ The blanket of water produced a very favorable greenhouse effect that created a moderate climate worldwide. They interpreted Gen 2:5-6 to teach that it in those days it did not rain, and suggest that the vapor canopy provided the mist mentioned. In addition, the canopy acted as a protection from cosmic rays, which perhaps accounted for the remarkably long lives listed in the genealogies of Gen 4-5.

Rejection of the Geological Column: Whitcomb and Morris argued that the geological column, with its strata and layers, was created by the flood waters of the Deluge. Rather than giving evidence of great periods of time, the layers testify to different phases of the waters rising, cresting and receding. They pointed to "frequent flagrant contradictions to the established

⁴ Ibid., 225-27.

⁵ Ibid., 239-43.

⁶ Ibid., 243-58.

geologic time sequences” and to inversions in the geological column in which the supposed ages are out of order. They concluded that the “geologic time scale is an extremely fragile foundation on which a tremendous and unwieldy superstructure of interpretation has been erected.”⁷ The world underwent dramatic transformation during and immediately after Noah’s flood, with the world’s mountain ranges being formed as the waters receded.⁸ In addition, the ice age, if it happened at all, occurred almost immediately after the Deluge.⁹

The Bending of Space Theory: The immensity of the universe poses a special problem to the young-earth position. It appears that light from distance objects has taken millions and billions of years to arrive at earth. This does not seem possible in a 6000-year-old universe. Young-earth creationism (YEC) advocate Kurt Wise sums up the situation well when he states, “A face-value reading of the Bible indicates that the creation is thousands of years old. A face-value examination of the creation suggests it is millions or billions of years old. The reconciliation of these two observations is one of the most significant challenges to creation research.”¹⁰ Remarkably, Whitcomb and Morris devote only two pages to the starlight and time problem.¹¹ They dismiss the issue with an appeal to the “appearance of age” argument. However, they also appeal to an article published in 1953 by Parry Moon and Domina Spencer. In the article, Moon and Spencer argued that light, when travelling great distances through space, was able to take a shortcut, so to speak. Rather than travelling in a straight line, light travelled

⁷ Ibid., 209; cf. 169-211.

⁸ Ibid., 141-53.

⁹ Ibid., 288-303.

¹⁰ Kurt P. Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches and Science Confirms about Creation and the Age of the Universe* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 58.

¹¹ John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Philadelphia: P & R, 1961), 368-70.

through “Riemannian space.” They concluded, “In this way the time required for light to reach us from the most distant stars is only 15 years.”¹²

Moon and Spencer never provided any mathematical support their hypothesis. And critics pointed out numerous problems with the theory. For example, if the theory were correct, certain nearby stars would take up more of our night sky than the moon.¹³ There is some evidence that Moon and Spencer presented their theory with tongue in cheek, and that they never meant for the proposal to be taken seriously.¹⁴ Whitcomb and Morris presented the bending of space hypothesis only tentatively, and rather put much more emphasis on the “appearance of age” hypothesis, or what is otherwise known as the mature creation view. We will come back to this issue later.

Dinosaur and Human Fossils Together: A centerpiece to the cumulative case presented in *The Genesis Flood* was the fossils found in a limestone bed of the Paluxy River near Glen Rose, Texas. Whitcomb and Morris presented photographs of what appeared to be fossilized impressions of dinosaurs and human footprints side by side. This evidence, they argued, overturned the conventional interpretation of geological history that the era of dinosaurs and the time of humans were separated by millions of years. Under the photos they declared,

These tracks were both cut from the Paluxy River Bed near Glen Rose, Texas, in supposedly Cretaceous strata, plainly disproving the evolutionist’s contention that the dinosaurs were extinct some 70 million years before man “evolved.” Geologists have rejected this evidence, however, preferring to believe that the human footprints were carved by some modern artist, while at the same time accepting the dinosaur footprints as genuine. If anything, the dinosaur prints look more “artificial” than the human, but the

¹² Parry Moon and Domina Eberle Spencer, quoted in Whitcomb and Morris, *The Genesis Flood*, 370.

¹³ Perry G. Phillips, “A History and Analysis of the 15.7 Light-Year Universe,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 40:1 (March, 1988), 19-23.

¹⁴ Robert Schadewald, “Moon and Spencer and the Small Universe,” *Creation Evolution Journal* 2:2 (Spring 1981), 20-22.

genuineness of neither would be questioned at all were it not for the geologically sacrosanct evolutionary time-scale.¹⁵

This was a spectacular piece of evidence. The photos of the fossils played no small part in convincing many readers (including me) of the feasibility of Whitcomb and Morris' thesis. An article in *Scientific American* predicted that “all the geologists will resign their jobs and take up truck driving” if the prints were found to be genuine.¹⁶ By providing a robust creationist model combined with exhibits such as the Paluxy River footprints, *The Genesis Flood* has had a powerful impact among conservative evangelicals. Unfortunately, as YEC proponent Paul Garner acknowledges, “not all of the ideas of the book have stood the test of time”¹⁷—including, as we will see, the Paluxy footprints.

The Current State of Young-Earth Models

Whitcomb and Morris inspired a generation of young-earth creationists, and I counted myself in their number. As a pastor during the 1980's, I invited a number of young-earth advocates to my church—Clifford Wilson, Carl Baugh, and Kent Hovind, to name a few. My church also served as an extension center for Clifford Wilson's creation studies institute headquartered in Australia. During this time two things became apparent to me: some within the young-earth camp lacked integrity and the model presented by Whitcomb and Morris had serious problems.

These issues were noted by others within the young-earth community. To their credit, organizations such as Answers in Genesis have attempted to address honestly the integrity issue.

¹⁵ Ibid., 174-75.

¹⁶ Quoted in Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 121-23.

¹⁷ Paul Garner, *The New Creationism: Building Scientific Theories on a Biblical Foundation* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2009) ,183.

And some YEC scientists have attempted to provide an updated young-earth model. One such scientist is Australian geologist Andrew Snelling. Snelling wrote the 1100 page, two-volume *Earth's Catastrophic Past: Geology, Creation, and the Flood* for the express purpose of updating the flood model presented in *The Genesis Flood*. But in many ways Snelling's work is a total revamp. Snelling, along with other YEC researchers such as paleontologist Kurt Wise and astrophysicist Russell Humphreys, recognize that the case argued by Whitcomb and Morris needed significant retooling.

Drops the Canopy Theory: Significantly, Snelling abandons the canopy theory.¹⁸ He and other current YEC advocates recognize that the biblical evidence for the canopy theory is tenuous at best. Some, such as Joseph Dillow, did extensive work to provide a viable model but today most YEC proponents have given up on the theory.¹⁹ Snelling points out there are simply too many scientific obstacles. Any such canopy would have created a runaway greenhouse effect that would have boiled the earth. He explains,

One consideration is that much more than a few inches of liquid water equivalent in a vapor canopy appears to lead to a runaway greenhouse effect. A second is that the amount of latent heat released from the condensation of water vapor limits the amount of condensation than can occur during the Flood without boiling the oceans and killing all the life on earth because of the high temperatures required to radiate the latent heat to space at a sufficient rate. These considerations imply that even if a water vapor canopy did exist above the atmosphere, it could not have contained sufficient water vapor to have sustained forty days and nights of intense, global, torrential rainfall.²⁰

Snelling accepts Humphrey's idiosyncratic interpretation that the "waters above the expanse" mentioned in Gen 1:6-8 are located on the other side of the universe.²¹ So where did the

¹⁸ Andrew Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past: Geology Creation, and the Flood* (Dallas: ICR, 2009), 663-67.

¹⁹ Joseph Dillow, *The Waters Above* (Chicago: Moody, 1981).

²⁰ Andrew Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past*, 472-73.

floodwaters come from? Snelling, along with others, argue for “catastrophic plate tectonics” (CPT). They suggest that subterranean reservoirs were unleashed during a catastrophic shift in the tectonic plates.²² The seismic activity exhibited today by plate tectonics is the residual effect of Noah’s flood. In addition to dropping Whitcomb and Morris’ canopy theory, Snelling also abandons the view that it did not rain prior to the flood (Gen 2:4-7).²³

Drops the Notion that the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics Is an Effect of the Curse:

Snelling, along with other global flood advocates, realize that Whitcomb and Morris’ argument that entropy was a manifestation of the curse was extremely problematic.²⁴ Without the second law in force no normal process would be able to function. For example, the second law is necessary for digestion. Whitcomb and Morris’ theory also seemed to be contrary to certain biblical passages. The Bible states that Eden had four rivers (Gen 2:10-14). Rivers are channels of water flowing from a higher level to a lower level. By definition they are examples of the second law in action.

Drops the Paluxy River Fossils: Snelling makes no mention of the fossils found in the riverbed of the Paluxy River. To their credit, most young-earth proponents (with a few notable exceptions) admit that the supposedly human footprints are in fact not human at all. Henry

²¹ Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 194-95, 212, 663-67; Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time: Solving the Puzzle of Distant Starlight in a Young Universe* (Green Forest: Master Books, 1994), 53-80.

²² Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 683-706; and Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time: What the Bible Teaches the Science Confirms about Creation and the Age of the Universe* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 181-89.

²³ Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 669-73.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 620.

Morris' son, John Morris publicly acknowledges that none of the prints “can today be regarded as unquestionably of human origin.”²⁵

Accepts the Geological Column: Snelling departs from Whitcomb and Morris at another significant point in that Snelling accepts the validity of the geological column.²⁶ The column is real, and so is the sequence of the fossil record. However, Snelling contends that the geological strata do not present a chronological record. Rather they give evidence of geographical distinctions. The four broad geological divisions—the Precambrian, the Paleozoic, the Mesozoic, and the Cenozoic—give evidence of four distinct bio-geographical regions. This forms the basis of the “ecological zonation theory,” which we will examine next.

Humans and Dinosaurs Lived at the Same Time but in Different Regions: The current global flood model must account for the fact that the remains of dinosaurs and those of humans are never found in the same geological strata. Snelling and others posit the “ecological zonation theory.”²⁷ YEC proponents argue that the pre-flood world was segregated into highly distinct zones. Garner explains, “According to the ecological zonation theory, the order of burial of adjacent ecological zones by the encroaching flood waters produced a vertical sequence of rock layers containing characteristic fossils.”²⁸ Dinosaurs and humans ate different foods, so then they probably also lived in separate regions or “biome.”

Floating continents: One serious challenge to the global flood model is the amount of coal and oil deposits located in the earth. Such deposits are the remnants of buried vegetation. There simply could not have been enough vegetation growing on the earth at one time to account

²⁵ John Morris, “The Paluxy River Mystery,” Available online: <http://www.icr.org/article/paluxy-river-mystery/>. Accessed 11-05-12.

²⁶ Ibid., 329-54.

²⁷ Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 173-74; and Andrew Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past*, 727-63.

²⁸ Paul Garner, *The New Creationism*, 199-202

for all the deposits that have been found. As a solution, Snelling, along with Wise and others, propose that during the pre-flood era there existed giant floating continents.²⁹ Upon these floating islands, which covered much of the world's oceans, grew immense forests.

Based upon this, it has been proposed that the Primary plants actually formed the basis of a large floating forest biome. Based upon how much organic material made up the coals of the Primary, this floating forest may have been subcontinent-sized or even continent-sized. The basic structure was probably broadly similar to the “quaking bogs” found on a number of lakes in the upper Midwestern United States. Quaking bogs are floating vegetation mats whose outer edges are made up of aquatic plants.³⁰

Thus Snelling, Wise, and other global flood proponents hope to account for the immense seams of coal and the oil fields that geologists find throughout the world.

Suspension of the Normal Laws of Nature: Snelling concedes that much of the geological evidence cannot be reconciled with any interpretation that uses the physical laws, properties and relationships as they presently are. He postulates that God miraculously changed the laws of nature during the Flood. Snelling explains,

Coal beds were formed during the Flood year, approximately 4,500 years ago, as were many of the granites that contain uranium and polonium radiohalos, because the granites intruded into Flood-deposited strata. Thus, it is concluded that hundreds of millions of years worth of radioisotope decay (at today's measured rates) must have occurred during the Flood year, only about 4,500 years ago.³¹

Appealing to a change in the laws of nature marks a remarkable change in YEC strategy, and in many ways it also makes a significant admission. As a strategy, it indicates an end to any real attempt to empirically establish the historicity of a global flood. Miracles, by definition, cannot

²⁹ Andrew Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past*, 675-77.

³⁰ Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 171.

³¹ Andrew Snelling, 847-48. Snelling admits that “the strata assigned to the Flood even appear to record 500 to 700 million years worth (at today's measured rates) of accelerated radioisotope decay.”

be scientifically examined. The appeal also admits that the scientific evidence does not support the YEC model.

Compressed ice ages: Standard geological models hold that during earth’s natural history there have been five distinct ice ages which cover hundreds of millions of years. In addition, mainstream geologists believe that over the last million years there have been a several glacial periods where glacial ice has advanced and retreated. These models, of course, do not fit with a global flood model. Global flood adherents argue that at the very most, from beginning to end, the ice age was only 700 years long.³² The ice surged out in a “couple of decades,” and then receded within “a couple of decades.”³³ The ice age lasted only a few centuries at the maximum. Therefore, rather than calling it the ice age, Snelling says a more accurate label would be “the ice advance.”³⁴

Accelerated evolution: Global flood proponents recognize that the ark presents two problems related to speciation: 1) the number of species that were on the ark, and 2) the worldwide distribution of species after they disembarked. The number of species of life on earth is mind-boggling. James LeFanu points out that there are over 40 species of parrots, 70 species of monkeys, tens of thousands of species of butterflies, 20,000 species of ants, 8,000 species of termites, 400,000 known species of beetles—this list goes on and on.³⁵ There are millions and millions of species.

³² Paul Garner, *The New Creationism*, 209-21.

³³ Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 215-16.

³⁴ Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 774-86.

³⁵ Charles Le Fanu, *Why Us? How Science Rediscovered the Mystery of Ourselves* (New York: Vintage: 2009), 59-62.

How did Noah’s ark contain so many different forms of life? And how did so many geographically specific species—such as kangaroos in Australia—disburse so quickly? The solution proposed by global flood advocates is one of the most controversial aspects of the model: a theory called AGEing process (where AGE stands for Altruistic Genetic Elements).³⁶ Snelling argues that instead of gathering the myriad of species, it was only necessary to gather progenitors who were specimens of each “created kind.” For example instead of loading dogs, wolves, hyenas, coyotes, and other canines onto the ark, it was necessary to have a male and female proto-canine (what he calls “baramin”). Then the number of required animals drop significantly. Snelling explains, “If, as the preponderance of evidence shows, the ‘created kind’ or *baramin* was possibly equivalent in most instances to the family (at least in the case of mammals and birds), then there would have only been about 2,000 animals on the Ark.”³⁷

The global flood model requires that a rapid diversification of species occurred immediately after the Flood. So proponents posit that species proliferated and dispersed in a matter of decades. Garner suggests that the creatures were “frontloaded” with genetically recessive traits that expressed when needed. He admits that in this area YEC has much more work to do, that there are “many as yet unanswered questions.”³⁸ Wise argues that many of the vestigial organs are the result of the rapid evolution that occurred after the animals left the ark.³⁹

Hugh Ross accuses proponents of the AGEing process of being “hyperevolutionists” who out-Darwin the Darwinists. Ross considers it ironic that, in their attempt to rescue the global flood model, YEC adherents are embracing a version of “ultra-efficient biological evolution.” He

³⁶ Paul Garner, *The New Creationism*, 140.

³⁷ Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 136.

³⁸ Paul Garner, *The New Creationism*, 141.

³⁹ Kurt Wise, *Faith, Form, and Time*, 219-21.

observes, “This efficiency of natural speciation exceeds by many orders of magnitude the most optimistic Darwinist estimate ever proposed....If naturalistic evolutionary processes actually did proceed with such speed, the changes would be easily observable in real time—in our time.”⁴⁰

Presuppositional Bias? Snelling repeats the assertion made by Whitcomb and Morris that the presuppositions held by mainstream geologists prevent them from considering the global flood model. Those who decide to embrace assumptions that go against the young-earth model and flood geology reveal a decision to throw off the authority of Scripture. “The bias exhibited by one’s choice of assumptions may not simply be a matter of objective science, but rather primarily of one’s subconscious spiritual condition.”⁴¹ However, many, if not most, geologists of the early 19th century were Christians who held to a high view of the Bible. These geologists gave up flood geology only reluctantly, and then only after they were convinced that the empirical evidence left them with no choice. As early as 1834, long before Darwin published his theory, an article in the *Christian Observer* lamented that Christian geologists felt they were intellectually compelled to abandon flood geology:

Buckland, Sedgwick, Faber, Chalmers, Conybeare, and many other Christian geologists, strove long with themselves to believe that they could: and they did not give up the hope, or seek for a new interpretation of the sacred text, till they considered themselves driven from their position by such facts as we have stated. If, *even now, a reasonable, or we might say POSSIBLE solution were offered, they would, we feel persuaded, gladly revert to their original opinion* [emphasis original].⁴²

The Bible-believing geologists of the 19th century were driven by the geological findings to the conclusion that the earth is ancient and that Noah’s flood cannot account for those findings. They

⁴⁰ Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy* (Colorado Springs: 2004), 121-30.

⁴¹ Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past*, 295-97.

⁴² Quoted by Philip Henry Gosse, *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (London: John Van Voorst, 1857), 5-8, fn. 2.

resisted this conclusion, and did not come to it happily. They certainly were not motivated by an atheistic agenda nor were they blinded by naturalistic presuppositions.

The Accusation of Fideism Parading as Science: To account for evidence that goes against YEC in general and the global flood model in particular, Snelling suggests that God supernaturally intervened to change the laws of nature during the flood event. Old-earth proponents Davis Young and Ralph Stearley, as fellow evangelicals, acknowledge that they, in principle, have no problem with an appeal to the miraculous. However, they contend that this puts the event beyond scientific investigation and defense.

The only recourse that flood catastrophists have to save their theory is to appeal to a pure miracle and thus eliminate entirely the possibility of historical geology. We think that would be a more honest course of action for young-Earth advocates to take. Young-Earth creationists should cease their efforts to convince the lay Christian public that geology supports a young Earth when it does not do so. To continue that effort is misguided and detrimental to the health of the church and the cause of Christ.⁴³

Davis and Stearley conclude that the entire “flood geology” enterprise is invalid as a scientific endeavor.

The Role of Presuppositions when Interpreting Empirical Data

As you can probably tell, my decision to move from YEC to OEC was motivated strongly (but not exclusively) by a reevaluation of the empirical evidence. However, I recognize that everyone approaches the empirical evidence with presuppositions. Facts are not self-interpreting nor do facts “just speak for themselves.” The question before me—indeed, before all of us—is how, when, and how much should the empirical evidence cause me to adjust or change my operating presuppositions. What should I do since the scientific data seems to clash strongly with my presuppositions?

⁴³ Davis Young and Ralph Stearley, *The Bible, Rocks and Time*, 474.

When reading the writings of Darwinists and young-earth creationists, I am struck by how presuppositions control the course of their thinking. The two positions are at opposite ends of the spectrum of position, yet they have some features in common. Significantly, both Richard Dawkins and Ken Ham recognize two things about the universe. First, the universe appears to be ancient and second, it appears to be very well designed. But they both believe these appearances are an illusion. What they disagree on is what part is the illusion. Dawkins believes the earth is old and the inference of design is a misconception. Ham argues that the truth is the other way around: the world is designed but its origin is very recent. What is going on here? Controlling presuppositions are at work.

Presuppositionalism or fideism? There are a number of approaches to the relationship between faith and reason, and at this point it is helpful to note the distinction between presuppositionalism and fideism.⁴⁴ As I noted before, presuppositionalism recognizes that all approaches to truth begin with certain these assumptions that are taken on faith. However, there is one important caveat at this point. The presuppositionalist believes that the validity of one's presuppositions must eventually be tested by using the laws of logic, and be demonstrated by a consistency with the evidential findings. Fideism, by contrast, does not believe one's presuppositions can be tested. Like the presuppositionalist, the fideist believes that one starts with certain presuppositions. But unlike the presuppositionalist, the fideist does not subject his starting assumptions to any type of feedback or check. The fideist operates by "blind faith."

Most YEC proponents identify themselves as presuppositionalists.⁴⁵ They start with the presupposition of the Bible's inspiration and authority (as do all conservative evangelicals).

⁴⁴ See Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 47-65.

⁴⁵ Ronald Numbers, *The Creationists: the Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992), 207.

However, YEC advocates add another crucial presupposition. Namely, they seem to hold that the YEC reading of Genesis 1-11 is the only interpretation available to the Bible-believing Christian.⁴⁶ The approach of many YEC adherents seems to veer perilously close to fideism.

Consider the testimony of Kurt Wise about his attitude towards empirical evidence:

As I shared with my professors years ago when I was in college, if all the evidence in the universe turned against creationism, I would be the first to admit it, but I would still be a creationist because that is what the Word of God seems to indicate. Here I must stand.⁴⁷

As the context makes clear, when Wise spoke of creationism, he meant the young-earth position. His courage, candor, and fidelity to the Scriptures must be commended. But if one's presuppositions are unassailable, then his approach has shifted from presuppositionalism to fideism.

In contrast, I concede that I allow the findings of science to influence the way I approach the creation account in Genesis. I allow experience and evidence to have a significant role in the formation of my position. Young-earth creationists are strongly critical of this approach and often characterize those who take this course in very harsh terms.⁴⁸ However, I reject the accusation that I allow the empirical evidence to subvert the authority of Scripture. In addition, I believe that their criticism is a case of the pot calling the kettle black.

⁴⁶ “Since the Bible undisputedly teaches a young earth, when someone claims that scientific evidence proves otherwise, we can be certain that they are mistaken.” Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle, *Old-Earth Creationism on Trial: the Verdict is In* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2008), 153. See also John MacArthur, *Creation Believe It or Not, The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13:1 (Spring 2002): 17.

⁴⁷ Kurt Wise, *In Six Days: Why Fifty Scientists Chose to Believe in Creation*, John F. Ashton, ed. (Green Forest: Master Books, 2001), Kindle location 5049-51.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of “Progressive Creationism” (Billions of Years), as Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2004).

The Only Recourse Left: The *Omphalos* Argument

Whitcomb and Morris appealed to the “appearance of age” argument, and so does Snelling. As far as I know, Russell Humphreys is the only significant YEC scientist who rejects the mature creation argument as an option. The mature creation argument originates with Philip Henry Gosse. In 1857 (two years before Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*), Gosse published *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot*.⁴⁹ Gosse was a respected naturalist and marine biologist. He is considered by many to be the inventor of the aquarium. *Omphalos* was well illustrated, well written, and revealed a thorough knowledge of geology, paleontology, and biology as understood in his day. Gosse surveyed the various attempts to reconcile the findings of geology with the first 11 chapters of Genesis—gap theory, day-age theory, appeals to Noah’s flood, among others. He found all to be lacking. He contended that the only viable alternative was the theory that God created a fully-functioning mature creation.

The mature creation argument (or the “appearance of age” hypothesis) makes the following observation. Anything created by God directly and immediately would have the appearance of an age that it did not actually have. For instance, Adam was created as a fully-mature adult male. He would appear, presumably, to be at least 18 years old. However, in Genesis 1-2, his actual age would have been only a few hours. Like Gosse, YEC proponents Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds argue that Adam would have possessed the appearance of age and the appearance of a history—complete with all the evidences of having been born. They state, “He looked as if he had once had an umbilical cord and had been in the womb of a woman. However, being created from the hand of God, he had no such history. Thus Adam has an

⁴⁹ Philip Henry Gosse, *Omphalos: An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot* (London: John Van Voorst, 1857).

apparent history different from his actual one.”⁵⁰ This is why Gosse referred to the mature creation view as the *omphalos* argument (*omphalos* is the Greek word for “belly button”).

Gosse made similar arguments concerning other plants and animals in the original creation. He points to examples such as the leaf scars on the tree fern.⁵¹ A tree fern’s trunk is composed of the scarring remnants of leaves that have fallen away, typically over a 30-year period. If one had stood in the Garden of Eden, by necessity it would have appeared to be much older than it actually was. Gosse also contends that hardwood trees created in the Garden of Eden would have possessed growth rings. These rings also could have been interpreted as indicators of age (and history) that the trees, in fact, did not have.⁵²

YEC advocates apply this line of reasoning to the universe as a whole. Henry Morris argued that when God created a star that is millions of light-years away, he created its light in transit.⁵³ Vern Poythress can be taken as representative when he extrapolates from Adam to the cosmos.

I suggest, then that the mature creation view offers an attractive supplement to the 24-hour-day view. It retains all the main advantages of the 24-hour-day view, by maintaining that God created the universe within six 24-hours days. It supplements this view with a clear and simple explanation for the conclusions of modern astronomy. The universe *appears* to be 14 billion years old because God created it mature. Moreover, the universe is *coherently* mature, in the sense that estimates of age deriving from different

⁵⁰ Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds, “Young Earth Creationism,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, J.P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 51. See also Philip Gosse, *Omphalos*, 289-90.

⁵¹ Philip Gosse, *Omphalos*, 131-3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 178-81.

⁵³ Henry M. Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth* (Minneapolis: Dimension, 1972), 62-3. See also Don B. DeYoung, *Astronomy and the Bible: Questions and Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 80-1; and Don B. DeYoung, *Astronomy and Creation: An Introduction* (Ashland: Creation Research Society, 1995), 48-9.

methods arrive at similar results. This coherence makes some sense. God created Adam mature. Why should we not think that Adam was coherently mature?⁵⁴

When Poythress states that the universe coherently appears ancient, he is arguing that the appearance is comprehensive, that the mature creation argument implies that the entire cosmos will uniformly appear to be old. Most YEC advocates do not apply the mature creation argument as consistently as Gosse and Poythress do.

Implications of the *Omphalos* Argument

First, *an appearance of age is an appearance of a non-actual history*. Gosse demonstrated this with a litany of examples. Fish scales, tortoise plates, bird feathers, deer antlers, elephant tusks and many more—all grow in successive stages that tell the story of that particular creature’s life.⁵⁵ Biologists regularly use these features to determine age of the respective animals. Gosse declares, “I have indeed written the preceding pages in vain, if I have not demonstrated, in a multitude of examples, the absolute necessity of retrospective phenomena in newly-created organisms.”⁵⁶ If the original creatures were created fully grown, then they were created with an apparent history. By extension, a universe created fully mature will, by necessity, give signs of a history that did not actually happen.

Second, *the mature creation argument is unfalsifiable*. This means it can be neither proven nor disproven. As Bertrand Russell observed, “We may all have come into existence five minutes ago, provided with ready-made memories, with holes in our socks and hair that needed

⁵⁴ Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Crossway, 2006), 116. Also Philip Gosse, *Omphalos*, 363.

⁵⁵ Gosse, *Omphalos*, 182-290.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 349-50.

cutting.”⁵⁷ Since there is no way to prove the theory, we have moved from the realm of science into the realm of metaphysics. The mature creation argument truly is a fideistic position, since it places creation beyond investigation.

Third, *the appeal to an appearance of age is an admission that the evidence is against the young earth view*. Gosse conceded this over 150 years ago.⁵⁸ If the overwhelming preponderance of empirical data pointed to a recent creation, then YEC advocates would not bother with such a difficult hypothesis as the *omphalos* argument. The very fact that YEC proponents find it necessary to appeal to the mature creation argument is a concession.

Fourth, *the mature creation argument seems almost to embrace a denial of physical reality*. Certain advocates of the argument do not hesitate to describe the universe as an illusion. Gary North declares, “The Bible's account of the chronology of creation points to an illusion....The seeming age of the stars is an illusion.... Either the constancy of the speed of light is an illusion, or the size of the universe is an illusion, or else the physical events that we hypothesize to explain the visible changes in light or radiation are false inferences.”⁵⁹ At this point the arguments for the appearance of age seem uncomfortably Gnostic.

Fifth, a consistent application of the mature creation argument will conclude *that there are no evidences of a young earth*. The universe has been coherently, uniformly created with the appearance of age. With the exception of Poythress, almost all young-earth proponents and flood geologists seem to overlook this portion of Gosse’s argument. But this was not a minor point to

⁵⁷ Quoted in Richard Dawkins, *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 2009), 13.

⁵⁸ Gosse, *Omphalos* 90-100.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Day*: (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 35.

him. It was, in fact, a main part of his thesis.⁶⁰ Gosse would have considered the efforts of Answers in Genesis, The Institute for Creation Research, and other YEC organizations quixotic as best and detrimental at worst. The appearance of age argument seems to imply that the movement launched by Whitcomb and Morris is misguided.

Sixth, Gosse arrived at the conclusion *that we should study the earth as if it were old*. He argued:

Finally, the acceptance of the principles presented in this volume, even in their fullest extent, would not, in the least degree, affect the study of scientific geology. The character and order of the strata; their disruptions and displacements and injections; the successive floras and faunas; and all the other phenomena, would be *facts* still. They would still be, as now, legitimate subjects of examination and inquiry. I do not know that a single conclusion, now accepted, would need to be given up, except that of actual chronology. And even in respect of this, it would be rather a modification than a relinquishment of what is at present held; we might still speak of the inconceivably long duration of the processes in question, provided we understand *ideal* instead of *actual* time;—that the duration was projected in the mind of God, and not really existent.⁶¹

This is a surprising, even stunning, conclusion. Yet it is entirely consistent with the logic of the mature creation argument. And, at present, the mature creation hypothesis appears to be the best argument that young-earth creationism has. The hypothesis may be true, but it will remain unproven and unprovable. The conclusion must be that, though a cursory reading of Scripture would seem to indicate a recent creation, the preponderance of empirical evidence seems to indicate otherwise. YEC advocates, by and large, do not use the term “scientific creationism” anymore. Despite 50 years of effort, the scientific endeavors of the YEC movement have borne little fruit.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 114-27.

⁶¹ Ibid., 369-71.

Conclusion

And so I moved from young-earth creationism to old-earth creationism. However, I find it very helpful to highlight the distinction between creation and creationism. One is a doctrine while the other is an apologetic approach. On the one hand, creation is a foundational doctrine of the Christian faith. The essential features of the doctrine of creation are unchangeable tenets. The Bible teaches that those features include the truths that God, without compulsion or necessity, freely created the universe out of nothing according to his own will and for his own good purposes. Though marred by the arrival of evil and sin, creation reflects the nature of its Creator. So creation is both great and good.

On the other hand, creationism is an apologetic approach which attempts to integrate the doctrine of creation with the current understandings of the natural sciences. In particular, creationism seeks to relate the first 11 chapters of Genesis to the latest findings of science.

So I teach my students that creation is an unchanging and unchangeable doctrine while creationism, by its very nature, must constantly change and be amended. The doctrine of creation is derived from Scripture, and is as old as the biblical witness itself. Creationism is relatively new, because it arose alongside the scientific revolution in the 17th century. As science developed, so did creationism, especially after Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. I remind my students that they must keep the distinction between creation and creationism in mind as we explore the important issues at hand. We must know what to hold firmly and what must be open to revision. Our commitment to doctrine must be strong, but we should hold to any particular apologetic approach much more loosely.