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D. E. Wonderly
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RECENT, NATIONWIDE DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO YOUNG-EARTH CREATIONISM
(An Update Summary of Events Having to Do With the Recent Creationist Movement, Occurring Between 1975 and 1983)

By D. E. Wonderly, March 1983

Introduction

An earlier paper, "An Unfortunate Circumstance...", traced some of the events leading up to Morris and Whitcomb's abandonment of the usual fundamentalist acceptance of long periods of time in earth's history. Here my purpose is to list and explain the significance of some of the more important developments related to creationism which have occurred since the "Unfortunate Circumstance" paper was written. The main emphasis will be on the more prominent, recent reactions to creationist extremism, and the effects of these reactions on the evangelical community. Some of the developments which have occurred during these years have come as a real surprise to most of us. Among these is the (harmful) upsurge of theistic evolution among evangelicals, apparently coming as a backlash from the anti-science aspects of the young-earth creationist movement. The increased willingness of Christian workers to accept theistic evolution seems to have contributed to the reluctance of prominent evangelical magazines to publish articles which expose the weaknesses and inconsistencies of this belief. These magazines usually are not even doing much to present materials which uphold a moderate, old-earth creationist position. (However, we have some reason to hope that this reluctance will decrease in the near future.) In the final section I will suggest a possible plan which, if begun soon, might enable evangelicals to recover from the great damage which extremism has caused among us. In this paper the terms "extreme creationist" and "young-earth creationist" are used as synonyms. "Moderate creationists" believe in an old earth but accept special creation, rejecting theistic evolution.

1. New Availability of Reliable Earth-Science Information

preserved environments - actually preserved by environment
A great wealth of data concerning the nature of the sedimentary rock strata of the earth has now become fully available to all of us. There are even a number of recent books which beautifully summarize (but still document) the many detailed, non-evolutionary studies of such important items as the many preserved, ancient seacoast environments and other shallow-water, natural deposits--now deeply buried. (These preserved environments, with their abundant fossils and naturally-formed layers are frequently found in vertically repeated series, which shows that long periods of time were involved in forming the preserved succession.) At the end of this no. 1 section, on page 2, a few of these books are listed.

characteristic produced i.e. preserved characteristic produced by environment
However, with great regret, we must report that the young-earth creationist leaders have continued their practice of refusing to seriously examine or study such deposits. In addition, they remain completely quiet about such fabulously thick, biologically-built structures as the Great Bahama Bank. These creationist leaders have also retained their practice of ignoring the research reports which describe local stratigraphic columns. There are now many thousands of these descriptions of local columns, based on recent deep drillings. The young-earth creationists continue to promote the very wrong idea that these columns are to be thought of as theoretical, the same as the composite geologic column which has been assembled by professional geologists and paleontologists. Thus, this group of evangelicals continues to confuse actual data with the somewhat illusive, composite geologic time table which is subject to revision.

With these and other weaknesses in the extreme creationists' system of thought, their efforts to convince educators and scientists of the truth of special creation have met with almost complete failure. These efforts (by creationist publications, public lectures, debates, etc.) have resulted in a widespread labeling of creationists as both ignorant of the geologic record and dishonest in their handling of data.

In the late 1970's several excellent books summarizing some of the many sedimentary research reports which had been published since 1960 became available. The ones listed below are perhaps the easiest for a beginner to use, though a geological dictionary will be necessary for those who have little or no background in earth science. Wilson's, Tucker's, and Laporte's are perhaps the more readable ones of this list. The Ginsburg book requires a familiarity with sedimentary geology in order to use it, but its content is important for showing us how the modern shallow-water environments of deposition are studied and found to be similar to the ancient ones.

- (1) Wilson, J. L., Carbonate Facies in Geologic History, Springer-Verlag, 1975, 471 p.
- (2) Tucker, M. E., Sedimentary Petrology, an Introduction, John Wiley & Sons, 1981, 252 p.
- (3) Laporte, L. F., Ancient Environments, Prentice-Hall, 1979, second ed., 175 p. (approx).
- (4) Reading, H. G., editor, Sedimentary Environments and Facies, Elsevier Co., 1979, 557 p. *second edition, Blackwell Scientific Publications, F 86*
- (5) Friedman, G. M., Principles of Sedimentology, John Wiley & Sons, 1978, 792 p.
- (6) Ginsburg, R. N., editor, Tidal Deposits: A Casebook of Recent Examples and Fossil Counterparts, Springer-Verlag, 1975, 428 p.
- (7) Fichter, L. S., Ancient Environments and the Interpretation of Geologic History, Burgess Pub. Co., 1979, 168 p. (a lab manual).

2. Interpretations of the Term "Creationist"

The extreme creationist leaders have been largely successful in cultivating and promoting the impression that the term "creationist" should be used only of persons who (a) use a hyperliteral method of interpreting the Genesis account of creation, (b) reject all geologic and other scientific evidences for long periods of time, and (c) accept the hypothesis that practically all the geologic strata and fossils were deposited by the Biblical Flood.

It has thus become necessary for creationists who believe in divine special creation without these extremes to carefully identify themselves. (Such "moderate creationists" and some of their beliefs are described in Part 3 of this paper.)

3. Some Results of Creationism's Recent Publicity

Because young-earth creationists have "gone public" with their teachings, by means of bills introduced into many of the U. S. state legislatures, court trials concerning public education, and public debates, there has finally been an "avalanche" of response--mostly negative. Some of the types of response we have seen to date are:

I saw this book at Indianapolis, briefly, and made a note that it "does not look at good as Environments Through Time by Anstey" - i.e., not as informative. But see front of my 2. Interpretations of the Term "Creationist" and see bot. of my 1987 biblog of Old Earth Cr. books for a few more to add.

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if recommended by Anstey.

(a) Non-evangelical geologists, biologists, paleontologists, and physicists have recently published many articles in scientific journals and magazines, exposing the inconsistencies of the young-earth creationists (to them all creationists). They cite much evidence indicating that these creationists regularly ignore the vast amounts of scientific data which show that the earth is old. (Compare Part 6, second paragraph, below.) Frequently the authors have stated that this disregard for evidence appears to be willful and inexcusable; in other cases they have attributed it merely to the creationists' lack of knowledge of the scientific research reports. However, most scientists and educators now see the creationists as usually showing some form of dishonesty or deceit in their approach to and use of scientific evidence.

(b) The excellent evidences against macroevolution and abiogenesis which the extreme creationists have publicized widely continue to go unnoticed by the scientific community and the general public. Scientific publications now frequently state that anyone who can not understand the meaning of even the simple geologic data can hardly be trusted to teach correctly concerning evidences against evolution.

Note--At this point the creationists have lost a golden opportunity to really "drive home" the strong arguments against evolution (macroevolution and abiogenesis) which are readily available to us. Because they have been unable to combine their arguments against evolution with correct and useful recognitions of the true nature and order of the sedimentary and fossil record, they have appeared to be mere amateurs, and have not been able to present their case in a manner that will impress scientists. In fact, we can never expect to impress unbelieving scientists until we show them that we are honestly considering all the natural evidences that are "out there" in the rocks. Until then they stand skeptical of everything we say, even though we may be giving good evidences against evolution.

(c) The increasingly-public teachings of extreme creationists have actually brought about a great upsurge of the teaching of atheistic forms of evolution, both in the colleges and universities, and in popular magazines, newspapers, and TV programs. In approximately the year 1980 the scientific community decided that it must begin to oppose both the extreme creationists' denials of scientific evidence and the arguments against evolution which they have been disseminating. So, non-evangelical scientists have banded together with liberal theologians, the American Humanist Association, and the American Civil Liberties Union to promote the teaching of evolution and oppose the teaching of creation doctrine. Special action committees for this have been formed in most of the states of the U. S., and a new journal, "Creation/Evolution," founded and widely circulated. Their program includes a strong, new effort to convince the American public that the evolutionary origin of man is not only a proven fact, but that it is an essential part of science and social science, and that the evidence for such an origin has a degree of credibility superior to that of all religious doctrines.

(d) The majority of evangelical scientists have found the publicity concerning creationist denials of scientific evidence to be so embarrassing that they have not only avoided associations with the extreme creationists, but have increasingly adopted theistic evolution. Thus the public proclamation of young-earth creationist doctrine has actually increased the acceptance of theistic evolution among evangelicals. This is a great loss, and has left the "mainstream" of evangelicalism in a state of confusion as to what to believe. (We must not forget that even most of today's evangelical educators, in obtaining their higher education, were exposed to courses and scholarly lectures which made evolutionary theory to appear very attractive and reasonable.)

(e) Many leading educators, the scientific community, and a large segment of the general public have recently become much more convinced that the Bible is full

of scientific errors and is irreconcilable with the discoveries of science. Young-earth creationist leaders have now widely proclaimed and taught that the arguments for creation, and against an evolutionary origin of life are intrinsically bound to the doctrine of a very young earth. So, the educational world has had opportunity to conclude, not only that the Bible contains highly unscientific teachings concerning the earth, but also that our arguments against evolution can be lightly dismissed, because they are (as far as they know) invariably associated with young-earth hypotheses which have no scientific foundation.

Note--It is extremely unfortunate that both the young-earth creationists and most other evangelicals have failed to propagate, circulate, and expand on the excellent work of the 19th century and early 20th century Bible-believing geologists and theologians. There were dozens of these outstanding defenders of Biblical faith who fought hard against the inroads of evolutionary theory, and wrote excellent works, including a large number of commentaries on Genesis, explaining that we need not be afraid of the geologic facts we observe, and that the Holy Spirit guided the writers of the Bible so that what was written does not contradict what is found in the natural record.

Most of the Bible institutes of the first part of the 20th century taught at least some variations of this harmony between the Bible and science, and the Scofield Reference Bible committees also set forth the same principle. The very recent creation of man was strongly affirmed, but long periods of pre-human life upon the earth were recognized. But now all this is neglected, and the majority of evangelical Christians have no knowledge of what was taught by these earlier creationists (to whom most of us owe a large part of our conservative spiritual heritage). The fact that many Bible teachers and Christian men of science have shown us satisfactory ways to harmonize scientific truth with the Genesis account of creation is known by fewer and fewer evangelicals. And by now the majority of U. S. and Canadian Bible institutes and colleges which formerly taught these types of harmonization of the Bible and the natural geologic record have been strongly infiltrated by young-earth creationist doctrine. So at present these schools offer no way to effectively answer the questions of scientists and students who have studied the strata of the earth, leaving such persons with the impression that the Bible and science are irreconcilable.

(f) There has been widespread acceptance of the extreme-creationist accusation that the "day-age theory" and the "gap theory" of creation are evolutionary and of no value. This has encouraged many evangelicals to think that a Christian has only two possible choices as to his beliefs concerning origins, namely, young-earth creationism and theistic evolution. As a result, both extreme creationism and theistic evolution are promoted, and the older special-creation views which recognize long periods of time are considered to be unacceptable by these people.

4. The Conflict Between "Flood geology" and Geologic Data

The "Flood-geology" method of attempting to harmonize science with the Bible, which has been so popular among many creationists, is constantly "losing ground," as Christians keep comparing its ideas with geologic data. The Biblical Flood was a massively destructive event, but a high proportion of the sedimentary geologic strata are made up of naturally-positioned, intricately-constructed layers, algal-growth colonies, and beds of fine-grain sediments which required long time periods for settling. Thus, a large part of the sedimentary record reveals mainly constructive building and growth processes, interspersed with periodic minor disturbances, instead of the kinds of effects which a massive flood would have produced.

"Flood-geology" creationists are also in a position of embarrassment because: (a) They still have no way of being certain that any of the strata they see on the continents of North and South America were produced by the Biblical Flood (though some may have been), and (b) Their formerly-convincing argument that a great flood was required for burying all the animals and plants that were to be fossilized has now been shown to be false. (The extensive earth-science studies of the past 20 years have shown that great "sediment flows" on the gentle slopes out from ocean shores, local catastrophic, terrestrial "debris flows" (such as at Mount St. Helens), and the widespread presence of euxinic sea-bottom conditions in ancient times can account for practically all of the fossils we find.)

These evidences for natural deposition, fossilization, and rock cementation processes have come mainly from the multitude of careful, non-evolutionary, sedimentary geologic studies which have been conducted during the past 25 years. The majority of these studies have been made in connection with petroleum drilling explorations, and some have been conducted by the government-financed Deep Sea Drilling Project. An inescapable outcome of these sedimentary studies has been the recognition that a very considerable percentage of the sedimentary record--from the bottom, almost to the top--was the result of biological growth processes. Thus in some local columns we find some thousands of feet of thickness of several types of limestone which include repeating, distinct layers that were formed in situ by the natural growth of lime-secreting marine animals and plants. (Many of the layers of the well-known Redwall Limestone of the Grand Canyon are of this type.) The existence of these layers--which often reach out for a radius of many miles from the study drill hole--is factual, and not in the realm of theory. Also, at many depth levels in various areas, we find types of sediment and rock for which drying and evaporative conditions were necessary for their production. These usually occur in repeating, vertical sequences, showing natural changes of the environment as one proceeds upward in studying the column.

Note--There is absolutely no reason why extreme creationists should not be studying the research reports which describe these types of strata, for hardly any of them are dependent upon either evolutionary theory or radiometric dating. Most of the reports--and also technical books which summarize the reports--are actually the result of studies which compare the modern and ancient environments for the purpose of predicting the location of fossil fuel deposits. Most such reports and books seldom mention evolution, and never make any anti-biblical statements.

Furthermore, the problem of the distribution of fossil types in the stratigraphic record continues to plague those who try to explain the strata as being practically all laid down by the Biblical Flood. Many major types of animals and microscopic organisms are present in the deep, lower strata but absent in the upper; and many are present in the upper but absent in the lower. All attempts to explain this by principles of hydrodynamic sorting or other methods of separation are completely contrary to the actual conditions we find in most of the earth's fossil beds. The recent efforts of some creationists to explain this problem by a hypothesis of "ecological zonation" during the Flood are a complete failure because their model could not apply to the vast deposits of ancient, fossiliferous sediments which are often two to six miles thick. The logic which is used to support the "ecological zonation model" could be valid only when one is thinking about a hypothetical earth covered by from perhaps 10 to 100 feet of sediments. In addition to this problem, the model can not be applied to the great array of fossilized planktonic organisms which we find throughout most of the sedimentary record. (These

are microscopic organisms which live floating near the surface of the ocean, world-wide. The hard-skeleton types are easily fossilized after they die and sink to the bottom.) The distribution of the different extinct kinds of these in the strata absolutely contradicts any idea that even ten percent of the species have lived since man was created.

In spite of all this evidence against the creationist "Flood-geology model," the extreme creationists are continuing to emphasize it in their current drive to promote "scientific creationism" in the schools. This model is included, in one form or another, in all--or at least practically all--the education bills which are being introduced into the state legislatures, and is re-emphasized in some of the recent young-earth publications. However, because the "Flood-geology model" is based almost exclusively on hypotheses rather than on the gathering of scientific data, the proponents of this belief are unable to present their materials on this subject at meetings where earth scientists frequently gather to present and discuss their research. This deficiency, plus the fact that the leaders of extreme creationism seldom if ever attend such professional geology meetings, further contributes to the widespread impression that they have no use for geologic data.

It is often easy to forget that the scientific investigations and reporting of most of the creationists who try to defend "Flood geology" are highly colored by the religious beliefs of Seventh-Day Adventist and other sects which have made the doctrine of a young earth a part of their officially adopted beliefs. It is common knowledge that the revival of young-earth creationism within the past 20 years--led by Morris and Whitcomb--was based mainly on the writings of George M. Price and other Seventh-Day authors. These men--some of them capable scholars in other fields of science--always selected the aspects of earth science which they felt they could use for making a case for "Flood geology," and avoided the remaining aspects, because the official statements of belief of their denomination demanded such a selection. They have continued this practice to the present time--though some Seventh-Day scholars have now at least quietly broken away from this "yoke."

5. The Terms "Scientific Creationism" and "Creation Science"

see the Winter 1984 Biblical Creation magazine (from England), p. 89-92 for an excellent

By adopting and promoting the terms "scientific creationism" and "creation science" the young-earth creationist leaders have placed themselves in a dilemma. There seems no way to use these expressions without encountering serious problems. Two of these problems are:

(a) Most of the leaders have followed Henry Morris' example in claiming that the truth of creation can be treated as a purely scientific model. This produces at least 2 degrading effects: (1) Many creationists have fallen into the absurd and harmful position of asserting that the doctrine of creation which we wish to teach is not necessarily a Biblical or religious belief; and (2) The eternal truth of creation by God is thus actually set up as a scientific model, to be "shot at," and "shot down" if found defective. (The term "scientific model" refers to any organized hypothesis which is proposed for scientific testing.) Thus, some creationist leaders actually refer to the doctrine of creation as "a working hypothesis." In reality the fact of creation is an eternal truth which does not need to be verified, and which Bible-believers gladly accept by faith in their living God. (We should keep in mind that a "model" or "working hypothesis" is even below the level of--and thus more tentative than--a theory.)

additional danger of "scientific creationism" is that it leads to the "scientific" model of creation being shot at and shot down. This is a very serious problem.

(b) In adopting a policy of attempting to force legislation which will require the teaching of creation in the public schools, the extreme creationists are really planning a course of action which can not produce beneficial classroom instruction. The proposal always offered is that creation be taught without reference to any God, or as Morris says, with "no reliance on Biblical revelation," and that an evolution model be taught along with the proposed creation model. Thus these creationists are asking that there be a presentation of creation doctrine without any Creator. This is the equivalent of denying God, and leaves room for all kinds of speculations as to what sort of heathen or imagined god or force might have done the creating.

Furthermore, the creationist bills introduced into state legislatures in Arkansas, Louisiana, and many other states always specify that the form of creation model must be the young-earth, catastrophic, creation idea which the writers of the bill believe the Bible teaches. This of course immediately raises the issue of which kind of creation should be taught along with the evolution model, and thus removes all possibility of agreement on the issue. These efforts to force one single, narrow view of creation teaching into the public schools have convinced most educators that the interest of creationists in public education is purely sectarian and religious--and therefore unconstitutional. Because of these problems it appears that there will be no way to teach creation in the public schools in the foreseeable future, and that those teachers who have been cautiously making their students aware of the Biblical teaching of creation will have to either curtail or reduce their efforts.

6. Young-Earth Creationism in Private Christian Schools

The mushrooming private, Christian school movement has suffered greatly in that young-earth creationists have so thoroughly taught their extreme views among the personnel of the curriculum publishers that very few consistently scientific teaching materials are being prepared. As a result, in this age when Christian schools are desperately needed, the quality of science teaching in them is so low that the oncoming generation of evangelical students is being given a badly distorted view of what science is and how scientific investigation is carried out. This is a great barrier to the development of students who might later wish to become research scientists.

It is true that young-earth creationists frequently use the term "research" in their writings--and even in their organizational names--but this is a misuse of the term. We of course must not adopt theories which contradict clear statements contained in the Bible, but scientific research involves an open willingness to examine all types of natural evidences and to freely discuss and accept what is found to be consistently true. In contrast to this, the Creation Research Society, in 1972, established an official policy of refusing to publish any articles setting forth evidence that the earth is old or that animal and plant life have been on the earth for more than a few thousand years (Creation Research Society Quarterly, Sept. 1972, p. 140). This means that the vast majority of all geologic research reports and data are barred from their publications. (This includes such material as the data from deep drillings in the oil fields and in the ocean sediments, and from careful studies of preserved ancient environments.) The three other main extreme creationist organizations (The Institute for Creation Research, the Creation Science Research Center, and the Bible-Science Association) have also followed this same policy of obscurantism.

Thus the principles of true scientific investigation of God's creation are being violated, and no competent earth-science research can be done by these organizations until such time as they might change their policies. Fundamentalist

evangelicals, and the Christians of several related groups--including a high percentage of the personnel who are active in the Christian school movement--seem generally to maintain the belief that a rejection of most of the geologic evidences concerning the history of the earth should be an integral part of their Christian faith. Thus the training of our youth is being greatly hampered by misunderstandings regarding the proper attitude of Christians toward scientific studies.

7. A Positive Suggestion for The Future

It appears that creationists have almost permanently lost out in their efforts to combat harmful types of evolutionary teaching in the public schools. This brings up the question of what to do now.

If truly worthy curricula could be developed and put into use in Christian schools, we could then, with God's help, privately train a generation of young people who could rejoice in the truth and reliability of God's natural records--as so many of the founding fathers of our evangelical belief did. These young people might then, in the future, have an opportunity to achieve some of what the present creationists have failed to do. Our nation is in desperate need of a return to belief in the Great and Holy God who not only created all things by His divine fiat, but established the righteous and moral Law which most educators and a majority of the American people now reject. We must pray that God will help creationists to "put their house in order," so that we can be effective in our witness to this ^{inform} sinsick--but wary--world. Certainly the least we could do would be to show them that the Bible is relevant to modern times, and not the antiquated, anti-scientific work which extreme creationists have represented it as.

For showing this generation that the Bible is compatible with science we could surely do no better than to use the methods employed by Hugh Miller, J. W. Dawson, and Louis Agassiz. These were conservative, Christian scientists of the middle and late 19th century, each having the highest degree of recognition in the scientific world, up to and far beyond his death. They, without apology, accepted special creation by divine fiat, but also let it be known that they had too much respect for the natural record of geologic history which God has left us, to disregard or minimize it. Furthermore, these scientists took time to study the Bible and to consult with conservative theologians so as to be sure that they were correct in their own understanding of Scripture. They represented the Old Testament writers as being careful not to deny the existence of long periods of time or to include other inconsistencies in their inspired writings. Thus, Miller, Dawson, and Agassiz, as well as a good number of other scientists and theologians of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nobly upheld the Christian truth of creation as being consistent with the natural revelation of God's works which we see around us.

Note--If more specific information, authors, or bibliographic data are desired concerning any part of the above seven sections, the author will be glad to supply these or to assist the inquirer in locating them. (The author's address is Rt. 2, Box 9, Oakland, MD 21550, U.S.A.) Also, the illustrated book God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments, by D. E. Wonderly, 258 pages, describes many non-radiometric evidences for long periods of time, and answers several questions on the relation between geology and the Bible. (It is available from the publisher, Crystal Press, 1909 Proctor St., Flint, MI 48504, U.S.A., at \$7.00.)