

REVIEW and PREVIEW

Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth

Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, editors

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Introduction

As I have written in previous reviews, too many evangelical scientists as well as most theologians and missiologists are so often bound by the epistemology of Modernity. This syncretism is so blinding because it encapsulates the pre-conscious worldview presuppositions of Western culture. Yet if we believe that the value and epistemic system of the surrounding idolatrous cultures “lies in the wicked one” and that they are “held captive to him to do his will” (1 Jn 5:19; 2 Tim 2:26; see Eph 2:1; 2 Cor 4:4), why should we accommodate it? I don’t say this flippantly because the god of this age does indeed hold people’s minds in darkness lest they see the glory of the Creator-God in the face of Jesus, the very Word of the Father.

The central thesis of this volume of fourteen articles is that modernity’s concept of deep time, and all the surrounding worldview shifts it has brought, has been devastating to theodicy. It is my opinion that any syncretism with deep time also shatters real Gospel outreach to scientists bound by the methodological atheism of modern and post-modern science. I believe all the Ph.D. or Th.D. theologians who author these articles agree.

The volumes I have been reviewing over the last several months attempt to break out of these blinders and to think outside of the *Zeitgeist* of Western culture with the goal of really reaching the scientific community with truth. Any syncretism between biblical Christianity and modernity, thus, drastically affects our task to disciple all people-groups and every family and friendship web through teaching them. Christ’s disciples are to think God’s revealed thoughts after Him and to follow our King in both implicit and thoroughly-thought-out trust in every area of life. A second implicit thesis of this present volume, I believe, is that bursting out of the bubble of the present modernity-evangelical alliance is essential if we wish to disciple the highly religious evolutionary materialists of the Western scientific establishment. As the editors write:

This is no arcane debate over trivial matters. Instead, it is all about glorifying the Creator’s name and nature, upholding the authority and clarity of His Word, and strengthening His Church for the purpose of bring to salvation many sinners from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 21)

Second, this volume implicit and sometimes explicitly agrees that there are no such things as neutral facts that compel us to believe something contrary to that which God reveals in Scripture. All sense perceptions are interpreted within either the self-construct of man’s wisdom “under the sun” or within coherence to the divine pre-interpretation flowing “from above” out of

the mind of the Creator. This volume suggests correctly that any syncretism of the two is the idolatrous worship of another god: “As will be shown, the deep-time [billions of years] geological timetable is actually an interpretive philosophical construct” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 17). Therefore, as the editors state earlier:

When scientific theories stem from anti-biblical philosophical presuppositions...should they be given any credence in adjudicating our interpretation of the Scripture? Old-earth proponents...tether its exegesis to the assured convictions of conventional geology, inferring that we need to concede what the majority of geologist claim as absolute fact.

But history indicates that nearly all scientific breakthroughs have come from the minority who have been willing to challenge convention. Scientists should be the last to forget that the scientific majority has time and again been proven wrong. (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 19)

The challenge for evangelical missionaries (and any other believers) is to think outside the cultural box. This volume suggests then that biblical thinking is similar to breaking out of the strangle-hold, for example, which the Greek four elements teaching had upon ancient philosophy. Or it is similar to busting out of the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic construct of crystalline spheres which both Tycho Brahe and Copernicus-Galileo-Kepler did but in radically different ways. (But that is an account for another review). All the authors of this volume advocate that only when we think biblically and presuppositionally outside of the stifling culture-box of evolutionary naturalism can we rebuild science. We do this by becoming aware of basic biblical worldview presuppositions, our own cultural paradigms, and then our own syncretism with non-biblical paradigms. I would suggest that only then can we re-assemble culture upon a sure Rock of wisdom “from above” (Jas 3:15, 17). Only then will we be able to reach the priesthood of the scientific *religio licita* with the *religio illicita* of the Gospel (to put it in Roman imperial terms). I would also predict that only in this manner can we survive the coming maelstrom when Western culture collapses if it does not turn back to the ancient consensual faith of our Reformational fathers.

The book I am reviewing is another outstanding example of the creationist—anti-creationist war going on for the soul of the English speaking evangelical world. This present volume succeeds admirably in what it intends to do. It is a series of essays dedicated to the long-time Recent Universe Creationist (RUC),¹ Prof. John Whitcomb. The aim of the present volume, according to the late Henry M. Morris’s foreword,² is not to provide “many good scientific evidences pointing to special creation, a young earth, and the global Flood” which many other competent scientists have written, but to give biblical proof of these doctrines primarily by theologians. These alone are the “compelling and definitive evidences,” Morris states (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 5). I agree. The Scripture purports to be the testimony of the only eye-witness to these events able to communicate to us today. As the all-seeing Triune Creator, He alone can witness and report without error in all that He affirms.

¹The author of one of the two forewords, Henry M. Morris, Snr., states he prefers the term “Young Earth Creationist” with acronym YEC (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 5). However, this is reductionist in my thinking. Recent Universe Creationism (RUC) gives the broader picture of the battle between the two world and life views that is RUC versus AUC (Ancient Universe Creationism), which is an attempted merging of the evolutionary naturalist perspective with that of Scripture. An impossible task due to the antithesis of God and man’s thinking.

²Dr. John C. Whitcomb was co-author with Morris in the epic volume *The Genesis Flood* (1961) that help catalyze the creationist movement since that time.

The late Dr. Morris is quite certain, “The Bible is explicitly clear on these issues, however. There is not even a hint of evolution or the long ages implied by evolution in the Bible. Neither is “there any biblical intimation that the Genesis Flood was a local Flood or a tranquil Flood, as theological theories...would require” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 5-6). Again I would agree and the essays in this volume go a long way to establishing this thesis.

From all the articles in this volume, it is clear that the present evangelical-modernity synthesis with deep time is but a blip upon history. It is one that will be crushed, in my opinion. The materialistic grand story of our culture and all of the other artificial social constructs that are being upheld with the guns and badges of an increasingly coercive and intrusive State will indeed collapse. The God of the Bible is the same God today as He was in 722 and 586/7 BC, 70AD, and 476 AD when other great civilizations collapsed that denied the full power of the Word. Only then will His international community certainly pick up the pieces and go back to the foundational culture (re)building truths revealed in Scripture. After all, that is what our Lord prophesied, “The gates of hell will not prevail” as we storm its gates with the Great Commission and its wholistic message for all of life. I recommend these articles highly though I wish that more scholars from non-Baptist and dispensational schools of thought were included.

Review of Chapters

Now, almost all, even those hostile to this thesis, agree that Morris’ description of cosmogony and early history was the absolute consensus of the church everywhere and throughout the ages until the beginning decades of the 19th century or so.

Historical Section

This is the thesis of the first three chapters on “The Church Fathers on Genesis, the Flood, and the Age of the Earth.” The sole Presbyterian author, David W. Hall, then studies the exegesis of Genesis 1-11 from Martin Luther to old ager Charles Lyell, who set the stage for Darwin’s views a few decades later. Editor, Terry Mortenson, echoing his doctoral dissertation, next gives the history of the Church’s “compromise” with “deep time” from Lyell to Darwin. These historical articles are essential information against any who wish that the record of the consensus of the universal body of Christ was ambiguous. There was a universal consensus in Euro-America for a recent creation in the space of six days a few thousand years ago up until the first quarter of the 19th century when that consensus began to crumble.

The next article by Richard Mayhue is foundational to the whole paradigm shift that took place from Lyell to Darwin to the present. It is titled: “Is Nature the 67th Book of the Bible?” as evangelical astronomer Hugh Ross and many others affirm. Mayhue goes through the supposed proof texts by which Ross and his allies affirm this premise and shows either that the faulty nature of his exegesis or a surface proof text methodology. That method is so common to both theological liberals and fundamentalists (and those in-between).³ Mayhue gives a comparison chart between what general revelation and special revelation can accomplish. He summarizes:

³Modernity and post-modernity bound theologians attempt to support such things as female ordination (e.g., Gal 3:28), an activist welfare State, or a multitude of other areas agreeing with their agenda with this method. Fundamentalists also use the method to try to prove such things as trichotomy (e.g., 1 Thes 5:17) or even a literal 1000 kingdom (Rev 19). All sides including the evangelicals and the evangelical “moderates” such as Ross do it to some extent. The key is to allow our thoughts to be molded by the biblical thoughts of God rather than vice versa.

General revelation...condemns only” and “can never be equated with Scripture” because “special revelation in Scripture...has no peer” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 5).

This has always been the consensus position of the universal church throughout history. Hence, what has happened in the interpretation of Genesis 1-11 is a fundamental paradigm shift at the most basic hermeneutical level. No compelling facts of science have motivated it, this chapter claims. Ever since at least about 150 years after Copernicus, Galileo and Kepler (but beginning with them, in my opinion) a dualist view of interpretation and truth has taken root in the Christian movement. In other words, dualism teaches that Scripture is only really infallible for religion and only science is virtually infallible for understanding nature. This means in my mind that evangelical intellectuals have been increasingly convinced that the core of the Gospel is what is really important. The primeval history is merely an external and ever-variable packaging that can be constantly readjusted so as to trim the sails to the prevailing cultural winds. What has been forgotten is what even J. Kepler himself said: God created man to think God’s thoughts after him. This is what Spirit-taught exegesis is supposed to do: To cause us to be wise and to see all things from heaven’s eyes. Yet both modernity and post-modernity bound hermeneutical theories deny this fundamental hermeneutical concept. It is vitiating evangelism to the scientific elite not helping it, in my opinion and the opinion of the authors of these historical chapters.

Hermeneutical Section

Hermeneutics, then, is the subject of the next chapter: “Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1-11” by Todd S. Beall. After mentioning that he surveyed over 200 different approaches, he concluded that a sound hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1-11 must

satisfy two conditions: first, allowing for differences in genre, it should be able to be applied uniformly throughout these 11 chapters, and indeed through the rest of the Book of Genesis....Second, the hermeneutical approach should arise from a study of the Scriptures themselves, not an external set of rules imposed on the Scripture. (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 132)

Now this flows out of the sound, classic hermeneutic of the Reformation’s *sola Scriptura* principle.

The author reviews four basic possible methodologies: The chapters 1) are basically mythological; 2) not myth but primarily figurative; 3) are “not entirely literal, but partly figurative;” and 4) are to be read literally as straightforward narrative prose. Beall notes ironically that those who hold the first viewpoint and the last viewpoint read the passage in the same manner. The only difference is that these critical scholars find no truth value in the account since naturalist materialism has convincingly demonstrated that the earth is billions of years old in their opinion. The so-called literalists hold that the account is truthful and accurate, binding believer’s lives, practice, and teaching (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 132).

After thoroughly discussing each approach, Beall addresses such related topics as “A Special Hermeneutic for Genesis 1?” and “Is Genesis 1 a Separate Genre?” to which he demonstrates a simple negative is the only possible answer available. Jesus and Apostles took the accounts as straightforward historical narratives and built doctrine and live application upon them, including the snake in the Garden. He also addresses such objections as the “Symmetrical Structure,” the contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2 and that the text of Genesis 1 is merely a rhetorical “polemic against ANE mythologies,” and the question of accommodation to pre-

scientific thinking. Each he sets skillfully to the side by reminding us of first of the nature of Scriptural truth in Hebrew narrative (i.e., not poetic or special narrative) form as it is written in the account, second of the authority of Christ and the apostles, and third of simple logic (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 152-160, 162).

Steven Boyd's article next demonstrates from a careful statistical analysis of Hebrew literature that Genesis 1:1-2:3 is indeed normal Hebrew narrative prose to purports to report factual historical data. He concludes: "It is not statistically defensible to read Genesis 1:1-2:3 as poetry. Thus it "should be read as other Hebrew narratives are intended to be read—as a concise report of actual events in time-space history, which also conveys an unmistakable theological message." This implies that there is "only one tenable view of its plain sense: these were six literal days of creation" and that the "age of the earth is...young – only thousands of years and no billions of years old" as the mythologizers and the literalists both agree (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 192). In other words, Genesis 1 and 2 is not poetry or some kind of unique poetic narrative, as some would classify these verses.

This leads to the next article discussing hermeneutical issues by The Master's Seminary Professor, Trevor Craigen, entitled: "Can Deep Time Be Embedded into Genesis?" Craigen definitely claims that such a time reckoning is not found in Genesis. He reminds the readers of the basic meaning of "day" in Genesis One because of three factors: (1) Time indicators in the text itself (e.g., "evening and morning day x"), (2) cross-references within the Pentateuch such as the Decalogue's discussion of the Sabbath, and (3) astronomical indicators in Genesis, which explain that days and years must be interpreted through the sun and star movements. Yet this standard fare is an excellent and virtually non-refutable summary. Following this, Craigen reminds readers of the multitudes of contradictions between the order of creation events and the evolutionary timetable. But again this is a standard though valid critique of the Day Age perspective on deep time. The benefit is the citation of articles substantiating his contention.

Last, Professor Craigen discusses the difference between classic historical-grammatical exegesis and what Carl Henry terms "scientifico-concept exegesis" that "gradually replaced" the former (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 208). This is a significant admission because the gradual accommodation of the classic hermeneutic to the scientific consensus of the age is the cause of the syncretism of modern evangelicalism with modernity. Modernity, in its hubris, presupposes that man beginning with his own mind and sense perceptions is capable of correctly understanding the meaning of and the connections between individual data points. Surely one of the benefits that Thomas Kuhn and Michael Polanyi have demonstrated is that knowledge is known within an interpretative paradigm framework. According to sound deduction based on Scriptural teaching, every individual fact comes to human perception already pre-interpreted by the Creator. All truth is His truth and upheld by His Word. Humanity, created as creatures in God's image and not independent gods, must learn to think God's thoughts after Him. We as evangelicals ought to understand this: "In Your light, we see light" (Ps 36:9). Only in the light of the interpretative framework of God's true Word can we see clearly and interpret the interrelationships between data points and their meaning. He creates and upholds all things by the Word of His power and hence we must never neglect either the Living or His written revelation.

The last article in the hermeneutical section, as I have divided the articles up, is an outstanding exegetical refutation of Meredith Kline's version of the Framework Hypothesis. It is one of several devastating critiques in existence of this kind of hypothesis. Author Robert McCabe from Detroit Baptist Seminary states that the basic issue is that "Kline has taken the

lead in crafting a modern exegetical reinterpretation of the creation account that allows for an old-earth model” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 247). McCabe correctly describes Kline’s hypothesis as “the creation ‘week’ of Genesis...is a literary framework intended to present God’s creative activity in a topical, non-sequential manner, rather than a literal, sequential one” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 212).

McCabe ably demonstrates that the approach fails the test of classic hermeneutics because the basic assumption of the “hypothesis” is that “Bible and science” are in “conflict” and hence the Bible, not science, must be reinterpreted. This is again a case of setting man’s thoughts ahead of the perspicuous divine thought as revealed in the Scripture—another example of “scientifico-concept exegesis.” The underlying presupposition is dualistic. According to Kline and his disciples, the clear Scripture description is true only on an upper level of Platonic form but not actually true in the lower story of observable fact as is described in the text. Besides assuming that all observations are neutral and self-interpreting “brute facts,” this hypothesis presupposes that man can gain enough certain knowledge of the creation by the inductive study of evidence without reference to God’s thoughts on the subject that can then be used to sit in judgment over Scripture. Human judgment over God’s words then necessitates the reinterpretation of Scripture. However, no facts are brute facts coming to our sense without divine pre-interpretation. All facts have been created and are presently being upheld by His living Word. Therefore, only God’s words as “wisdom from above” and not human folly “under the sun” can give a large enough framework of insight in order to interpret one’s sense data.

Kline’s hypothesis also subtly presupposes that unbelieving man searching for scientific evidence will not suppress ready evidence of the Creation and the universal Flood and also will not lie about that evidence in order to try to escape from the knowledge of the Creator he already knows. Sadly as a scholar within the Augustinian-Calvinian school of theology, the late Meredith Kline ought to have known this. As a longtime member of Westminster Seminary and former colleague of C. A. Van Til, he ought to doubly know these truths. Contrary to what Kline and his disciples may claim, I really don’t see much difference between this view and that of the Barthians, who make a similar claim but are more honest. Barth forthrightly stated that Genesis 1-2 is sage, legend, and perhaps myth that can teach spiritual truth but certainly cannot instruct science in geological or historical factuality. However, we can never really reach materialist bound scientists if we grant them their presupposition that they have the autonomous ability and right to interpret the creation without reference to the Creator’s framework of wisdom on the subject. So McCabe is essentially correct in his analysis and refutation of Kline’s hypothesis.

Exegetical Section

Even though McCabe’s article was exceedingly able exegetically, it did deal with foundational hermeneutical issues, thus I placed it in the previous section. However, the next several articles deal specifically and quite insightfully with exegetical issues. The first by Old Testament scholar William Barrick of The Master’s Seminary is a careful study of “Noah’s Flood and Its Geological Implications.” Barrick exegetes the chronological markers found in the text of Genesis 6-8, shows grammatical indications of “large-scale, back and forth, circulating motion that could have had profound effects in shaping the new landscape,” and a gives a detailed discussion of the various “sequential chains of events” in the Deluge narrative (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 252). Thus the biblical account as it is written shows a complete disruption of the earth, its geological landforms, and surface was “comprehensive and global.”

He shows that no amount of exegetical gymnastics can escape its clear global nature (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 254).

The author also discusses how evangelical scholars too often baptize “secular and humanistic theories in evangelical waters without realizing that those theories and their methodologies have never been converted” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 252). Now in my opinion it would have greatly strengthened his argument to have discussed Paul’s principle of antithesis at this point in his article. This perspective, of course, was developed especially by Dutch Reformed scholars and teaches that human and divine wisdom are totally opposite (see e.g., 1 Cor 3:18-20). Any science that produces beneficial results in contemporary times must illegitimately steal biblical worldview axioms and surreptitiously smuggle them back into the worldview of scientific naturalism. However, Barrick does support the *a priori* nature of biblical wisdom and the fact that it does not need any confirming human witness to be true. That was excellent and necessary. Naturally the need for two to three eyewitnesses is only necessary in finite, fallible and myopic human courts but not in Scripture. The infinite, infallible Alpha and Omega does not need to swear by anyone but himself to validate any truth He reveals (see Heb 6:13-18).

This *a priori* perspective serves Barrick well as he carefully exegetes the Flood narrative showing that it certainly was not a local and placid phenomena but over a year long, global in extent, and violent. All land dwelling and air breathing life perished – both human and animal. The landscape of the earth was irreversibly devastated and then the earth “recreated” as a cursed version of the original creation. In the process of this exegesis, Barrick develops new insights such as the fact that the rain and fountains from the “deep” did not stop until the 150th day, and that chapter 8:3 describes a back and forth motion of violent tsunamis on the planet as the waters were subsiding. Certainly there is no room in the Scriptural narrative to compromise with uniformitarian geological theories.

Next, Southern Baptist scholar, Travis Freeman, summarizes the excellent biblical evidence that the twin genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 are “chronogenealogies.” In other words, they are not fluid, as some allege, with many gaps. Instead, as Freeman’s careful exegesis shows, they contain careful internal indicators that they can indeed be used to date the events of creation. Furthermore, both the ages of the fathers when the sons were born and careful comparison with other passages of Scripture demonstrate that his approach is valid. For example, Jude 14 states that Enoch was seventh from Adam. His correct conclusion is that there are different genres of genealogies. Only some have gaps. But the ones in these two chapters carefully detail dates of birth and other data which show that the author intended them to be used for accurate dating. The fathers of the ancient assemblies of God, both Hebrew and Christian, almost uniformly and with exceedingly few exceptions viewed them in this manner.

The next chapter entitled “Jesus’ View of the Age of the Earth” by co-editor Terry Mortenson is also vitally important. It focuses on what I believe is the key issue in this discussion. Should we bring a recent universe (RUC) position to the peoples of the earth when we disciple them and should we continue to approach the “unreached” scientific world with this same position? Precipitated down to its basic substrate, this leads to two questions. Is our philosophy and wisdom founded upon Christ in more than the most abstract sense and is He our Wisdom in every aspect of His own world and life view, even as Paul claims he should be (e.g., 1 Cor 1-3; Col 2)? After all, as Mortenson demonstrates, our Lord spoke about and lived within a worldview framework of truth derived from OT revelation.

Now, however, in his careful survey of theologians and commentators, Mortenson demonstrates that the vast majority of contemporary evangelical scholarship totally overlook “the Jesus AGE verses” that reveal his view of the age of the universe (e.g., Mortenson and Ury 2008, 335; see Mk 10:6, 13:19-20; Lk 11:50-51). Or the few who do discuss these passages use deft exegetical legerdemain to get around their perspicuous meaning. This seems to be similar to how Jeremiah criticized his self-wise contemporaries and for what our Lord Himself sharply rebuked the Pharisees for practicing (Jer 8:8; Mt 15:6). The “lying pen” and the “tradition” of the experts have “handled [the Word] . . . falsely” and “invalidated the word.” Mortenson’s careful exegesis of the Jesus AGE passages demonstrates with certainty that our Lord believed that God created human beings at the beginning of only a few thousands of years of history. They did not come into existence at the end of 15 billion years of evolution. Jesus clearly states: “But at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female” (Mk 10:6 NIV).

Now I am certain that evangelical scholars would holler loudly – and perhaps rightly so – if I would suggest that they are syncretistic in the areas of biblical morality or the core doctrines of evangelicalism. However, the subtlety of dualism is so pernicious that it blinds our eyes. As our Lord lived within biblical authority, it makes a seamless transition between morality and core doctrines to history, cosmology, cosmogony and any other area that it addresses. For Jesus, there is no such thing as scientific truth as distinct from spiritual, religious truth. And He didn’t accommodate the foibles of the pre-scientific era. That is begging the question. Thus the crucial issue for us and for the scientific world is who our ultimate authority is? Is it Scripture or autonomous man? The two perspectives cannot be syncretized. Mortenson correctly stands on the side of “Jesus’ worldview (i.e., that He was [and still is] a young-earth creationist)” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 338, brackets in the original). In other words, our Lord’s Gospel presents a complete antithetical worldview story to that of idolatrous evolutionary materialism. It is that whole message that will someday transform our idolatrous Western scientific elites: “The LORD will be terrifying to them, for He will starve all the gods of the earth; and all the coastlands of the nations will bow down to Him, everyone from his own place” (Zep 2:11 NAU; see Jon 2:8; Zec 13:2). Atheistic materialism is just as religious and faith-based as is biblical Christianity. Yet it cannot account for any of the principles of order, predictability, morality, and so forth, which it uses, but actually steals from the biblical worldview. These principles do not spring out of randomness, chaos, explosions, and purposelessness implicit in materialism.

In the next article, “Apostolic Witness to Genesis Creation and the Flood,” theologian Ron Minton demonstrates in a similar manner that the Lord’s Apostles shared his worldview. Minton demonstrates that “there is not a single statement in the apostolic writings that would incline one toward believing the earth is millions of years old or that the Flood of Noah was anything less than global in extent. On the contrary, the NT writers teach both recent creation and a worldwide Flood, just as Jesus and the OT writers did” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 348). Again he shows how major evangelical theologians completely overlook the crucial texts, all of which uphold a perspicuous reading of the OT narratives (see e.g., Acts 3:21, 14:15-17, 17:24-31; Rom 1:18-25, 5:12-14, 19, 8:19-23; Col 1:15-20; Heb 4:1-10, 9:25-26, 2 Peter 3:3-8; Rev 14:6-7, 21:1-5, 22:2-3). He, however, missed an in-depth discussion of a crucial passage in First Peter that discusses the Flood and the 8 humans who survived (1 Pet 3:20). Minton’s conclusion, however, is sound: “From Acts to Revelation, the Apostles continually declare . . . that the early chapters of Genesis are straightforward history. They never hint that the creation is much older than mankind” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 370).

Next in the exegetical section, Institute of Creation Research (ICR) librarian, James Stambaugh, deals with an absolutely crucial topic in any biblical, Gospel-oriented worldview for all peoples: “Whence Cometh Death? A Biblical Theology of Physical Death and Natural Evil.” Here Stambaugh corrects the misconceived teaching of some Ancient Universe Creationists (AUC). Some, such as Hugh Ross, think that the Scripture teaches that death occurred before Adam’s Fall. The classic consensual view of the Church was that no death occurred before Adam’s sin. To this Ross and others object that surely plants had to die before the Fall because Adam, Eve, and the animals had to eat vegetation. Therefore, death existed before Adam and it is not a natural evil. However, after surveying the various passages AUC’s suggest, Stambaugh concludes: “biblically speaking, there is a sharp and significant difference between, on the one hand, humans and animals (which live and die in the same physical sense), and on the other hand, plants (which do not live and die in that same sense)” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 380). Plant perish but humans and animals die thus there was no true death before Adam

Stambaugh establishes that the creation was originally good in every aspect. Death for humans and animals thus came because of Adam’s act of unbelief and rejection of God and were not implicit in God’s creation. In other words, if God created a world with death inbuilt in it, then God was the cause of natural evil. This is a huge dilemma for AUCs. The only way to escape from the dilemma is to redefine “very good.” However, a good creation is essential to the Grand Story, the biblical metanarrative, if you will. Pagan religions such as Buddhism begin with natural evil and try to deal with it as normal and something to escape from. However, the biblical faith sees natural evil such as death as abnormal. All forms of natural evil are things to be battled against with all the weapons of faith and wisdom (which includes true scientific knowledge) that God provides. This is fundamental to the Gospel message. It was the missionary movement that brought TB clinics, hospitals, sanatoriums for the lepers, and schools for girls. It was not Hinduism, Buddhism, folk religion, Islam, or any other of the major religions. Only the message and wisdom of God in Christ as found in the whole Grand Story (Creation – Fall – [comprehensive] Redemption – Consummation) brought these gifts of God to mankind.

Stambaugh ends with apologetics: “The idea of a ‘perfect’ creation seems to be fundamental for a consistent Christian theology or theodicy” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 396). He concludes that if death and a total curse on creation came from Adam, then resurrection life has broken into that cursed creation in Christ. Here, I wished he had discussed the liberating concept of the Second Adam. An essential part of the warp and woof of the Great Commission’s Gospel message is that the Second Adam’s resurrection power is now progressively overcoming the comprehensive curse until it is completely overcome in the Consummation, when the last enemy, death, is conquered. This, however, is almost always neglected in premillennial Dispensationalist circles from which the vast majority of the authors of this volume are drawn. Yet even without this transformative biblical doctrine, Stambaugh’s article is essential for developing a sound missiological approach to the peoples of the earth and especially the scientific world.

Philosophical Implications

The last article in the volume is by co-editor, Systematic Theologian Thane Ury. The basic issue for this chapter is also “if God exists, why so much [natural] evil?” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 400, brackets added). To answer this Ury lays out three propositions: 1) God is always good; 2) He is not limited in power; and 3) evil exists. Christians affirm all three, which creates a justification problem for God. To solve the problem, Ury distinguishes between two evils: Moral and natural. Moral evil means that personal beings voluntarily rebel against the Creator’s

revealed morality. Natural evil is “linked to impersonal causes, and may be called amoral” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 401). These include tornados, earthquakes, sickness, death, and the like. Yet AUC creationists must believe that natural evils are normal and part of nature from the beginning. Nevertheless, Ury asks, how can a good God create such a defective universe that causes so much suffering?

To provide a biblical theodicy, Ury first discusses the teaching of three key fathers of the Protestant movement (Augustinians Luther and Calvin) and Arminian Anglican, John Wesley. He concludes that for each of these leaders natural evil was caused by the curse upon the creation because of Adam’s sin. However, when evangelical leaders began to accommodate deep time several decades before Darwin, this justification of God’s actions upon the earth ceased. Compromise with the assured results of science became the norm with the excuse: ““have we learned nothing from the Galileo affair?” — [and so they] did not accord Genesis 1-11 the same level of historicity as the reformers did” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 412, brackets added). This is a crucial admission that no one in this volume addresses. The slide away from biblical authority began with Copernicus and Galileo not with Lyell and Hutton’s millions of years teaching a few decades before Darwin, in my opinion. However, the rest of what Ury discusses is very practical and shows how a growing difference in opinion of God’s character grew between what he calls the “accommodationists” and “traditionalists” (an unhappy term, in my mind. I like “Scripturalists”).

To demonstrate this growing worldview rift one leading to apostasy and the other remaining at least verbally within the ancient orthodoxy of the Christian movement, Ury discusses “seven theodicy-related contrasts” between the Scripturalists and accommodationists. (1) “In what manner was the finished creation very good?” (2) “Does the postlapsarian world bear penal scars?” (3) “The cause of deep-time serial catastrophism.” (4) “The cause of physical maladies and diseases.” (5) “The origin of predation?” (6) “The cause of animal and human death.” (7) “The bearing of paleonatural evil on God’s character” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 412-420). After carefully comparing the two perspectives, Ury shows that the view of God has changed from one reflecting “tender compassion and protective grace” to one in which natural evil is seen as beneficent (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 421-422). In other words, the accommodationist’s view of God is one “who created whole species whose main purpose seems to have been to serve as nothing more than roadkill on the evolutionary highway” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 422-423).

This definitely changes the father’s understanding that the first creation was “very good.” It also hamstring our Christian mission. Should we now believe that natural evil is therefore not evil but somehow good? It undercuts the message that the Gospel is one of wholistic healing “as far as the curse is found.” We are to fight against small pox, polio, cancer, diabetes, TB, as much as against the politically correct disease of AIDS. We are to fight illiteracy so that all can read God’s Word, against ignorance and darkness of every sort as part of the Gospel. We are to fight against birth defects and try to regrown amputated limbs and damaged internal organs. And we are to fight against truncated life spans. Anything less is a truncated Gospel and powerless to overcome all that the enemy and sin have wrought upon God’s good creation. Without the whole Gospel, all that is left is a pious, almost Gnostic, private religion between the ears with little or no relevance for the beautiful but now broken, bent, twisted, and perverted universe that sin has produced. Is the Gospel is only for heaven with little real relevance here? Is there any wonder Satan’s lies seduced the once evangelical Karl Marx, who found in evolution scientific respectability for his ideology? (Read his high school senior thesis on John 15).

Conclusion

In conclusion, “the authors of this book are convinced that no properly interpreted scientific facts will ultimately contradict a straightforward reading of Genesis” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 427). I agree wholeheartedly. The issue is “sola Scriptura” because Scripture first “provides the protective parameters for interpreting our observations of creation, not the other way around” (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 427). Anything less than an a priori commitment first to think God’s thoughts first, then, second, to interpret the data of the creation in that light leads one steadily away from the truth and from the complete creation saving Gospel. Ury concludes and I heartily approve:

The price tag of inserting millions of years into the Bible has been quite costly. First, we are asked to ignore many details of the biblical text in Genesis and elsewhere in Scripture, as discussed in this volume. Second, we must also reject, ignore, or otherwise suppress the plain teaching of Jesus and the Apostles. Third, by incorporating “deep time” into our thinking, we undermine the Bible’s teaching on the origin of death. Fourth, we sully the character of God by adopting a view that has no other recourse but than to affirm that the natural evil we presently observe was designed and called very good by the Creator. First, we are left with many other thorny conundrums, the least of which is this: if our omnipotent Creator’s finished work was not death-free (death even seen as “good”), then what assurance do we have that the new heavens and new earth will be death-free? Why trust Scripture on the eschaton, but not the beginning? No matter how sincere one’s motive are, or how unintentional the fallout, tethering deep time to Scripture ultimately undermines the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is rooted in the literal history of Genesis, and the hope of the Gospel in the eternal state, where there will be no more natural or moral evil. (Mortenson and Ury 2008, 428)