

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Readers are invited to submit reviews of current literature relating to origins. Mailing address: ORIGINS, Geoscience Research Institute, 11060 Campus St., Loma Linda, California 92350 USA. The Institute does not distribute the publications reviewed; please contact the publisher directly.

YOUNG'S OLD EARTH

CHRISTIANITY AND THE AGE OF THE EARTH. Davis A. Young. 1982. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House. 188 p.

*Reviewed by Stephen F. Barnett, Division of Natural Sciences,
Bryan College, Dayton, Tennessee*

Davis A. Young is both a practicing geologist and a theologically conservative, evangelical Christian. He is acutely distressed at the credence given to “recent creationism” by so many within the evangelical community. *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* appeals to those Christians to reject recent creationism as a view neither mandated by Scripture nor supported by science.

In the first of the book’s three major “considerations” bearing on the age of the earth, Young traces the development of an ancient earth concept in the theological and geological communities. The predominant view from the time of the early Church until about the 18th century, says Young, was a literal acceptance of creation in 24-hour days within the past few thousand years. Early geologists thus tended to interpret evidences from stratigraphy and paleontology in light of the Genesis flood account. However, many observations in those and other areas, such as geomorphology and geochemistry, seemed to indicate processes requiring longer than the few thousand years allowed by a traditional view of Genesis. By the latter half of the 19th century most geologists, many of whom were Christians affirming the validity of the Genesis narrative, adopted a much longer chronology for earth history and viewed the flood as a minor element in earth history.

The changing consensus among geologists prompted theologians to examine Genesis anew. They began to develop exegeses that were believed to be consistent with both the internal evidence of the Scriptures and with the accumulating evidence from geology. This “age of harmonization” (p 55), as Young terms it, lasted well into the 20th century until “reactionary developments” (p 65) led to a resurgence in flood geology. Price, Nelson, Clark, and Rehwinkel were the early proponents (1920-1950s), but the

strength of the movement is attributed primarily to Whitcomb and Morris' *The Genesis Flood* and to the Institute for Creation Research, the Creation Research Society, and like organizations.

The resurgence in flood geology is a mistake, says Young, predicated by the faulty reasoning that an ancient earth is part and parcel with evolutionary humanism; the issues are separate and "while evolution falls if the antiquity of the Earth falls it does not necessarily stand if the antiquity of the Earth stands" (p 66). In fact, Young continues, the ancient Earth view was developed by Christians who affirmed both creation and the flood but who were forced by the facts to recognize the antiquity of our planet.

In his second consideration, the scientific evidences against creationism and favoring long ages are presented. In support of his contention that the flood geology of recent creationists is ill-founded, Young cites examples from many aspects of earth science such as stratigraphy, geochemistry and sedimentology. He asserts that the problems confronting flood geologists, when recognized, have been inadequately addressed. They either have attempted to answer the problem but failed, as in the case of radiometric dating, or they have merely given the illusion of solving problems through spurious proofs. He further asserts that many of the best evidences cited by creationists for catastrophic deposition of the geologic column (e.g., polystrate trees and fossil graveyards) can be explained as well, if not better, by long-age models.

According to Young, creationists have not solved the problems confronting their model and they have been similarly unsuccessful in attacking uniformitarian models. Their arguments are weak due to a basic lack of geological knowledge and improper reasoning.

His third area of consideration is philosophy and apologetics. Young challenges the creationists' claim that catastrophism alone can explain the geologic column. He insists that despite their insistence that uniformitarian thinking is ungodly and inadequate as a basis for historical geology, "creationists are really uniformitarians who have falsely interpreted the evidence of geology" (p 136).

The final chapter analyzes the relationship between science and faith and between truth as revealed in nature and in Scripture. Young affirms that both natural and written revelation emanate from one God of Truth; as such there can be no conflict except in our interpretations. There will be tensions in matters of faith because we do not know all the facts nor do we interpret them aright; but tension in the matter of the antiquity of the earth is inexcusable because we have clear natural revelation that conflicts

only with certain faulty exegeses of Genesis. Creationists would do well to examine both their science and their understanding of Genesis and see that this is so.

It is difficult to review *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* with objectivity for, whatever the merits of the book, it is itself decidedly weighted in its presentation. In the preface Young states his worthwhile objective: “to examine some of the evidence of nature that relates to the age of the earth” (p 10); yet, the reader is not given the opportunity to evaluate that evidence for himself.

Discussion of the scientific data is mostly confined to the middle third of the book, the rest being historical observation and philosophical conjectures. The data are generally accurate and referenced (with the exception of all text-figures), but the presentation is not impartial. To begin with, the tenor of the text clearly disparages both the belief of recent creationists and their persons as well. For instance, creationists are labeled as “the equivalent of Miller’s ‘anti-geologists’” (p 14), and those who hold to flood geology are generally “Christians who are not engaged in scientific endeavors” (p. 64) or who “have looked only at those rocks” favoring their *a priori* beliefs whereas “geologists have looked at all the rocks” (p 148).

The presentation of the creationist’s case seems slanted also. Time after time Young cites Whitcomb & Morris’ *The Genesis Flood*, a book 22 years old, to show the weaknesses of flood geology. For example, in the case of fossil reefs, he reproves Whitcomb & Morris for not explaining how reef-like blocks of limestone could be deposited over fine-grained sediments. Their view is “totally unsupportable” and the “only realistic interpretation of the evidence is to say that the reef structures grew in place on an ancient sea floor” (p 85). But, although Young refers to a 1975 article by Nevins claiming that some so-called reefs were not true reefs at all, Young does not address Nevins’ data; he just shows that Whitcomb & Morris’ model for reef emplacement is ill-supported.

Again, his chapter on radiometric dating records only weak creationist arguments for a short chronology, but in another chapter he notes in passing that Gentry has done work with serious implications for radiometric dating (p 151). The nature of that data or why it “is indeed problematic” for standard dating methods is neglected. If only the facts provided by Young are considered his conclusions seem well supported, yet one feels that there is probably more to be said for the flood model than Young has presented.

Another difficulty is Young's occasional use of interpretation in the place of data. For instance, he refers to "varves" rather than laminated couplets (p 90), to the "obvious terrestrial derivation" of some rocks (p 79), and to claims that certain cross-bedded sandstones from the Colorado Plateau could not be flood deposits because these "ancient desert sandstone[s]" (p 91) required a very long and dry period for their deposition. There may be sound reason for these interpretations, but they are not facts. Regarding, for instance, the so-called ancient desert sandstones, there is strong disagreement among uniformitarian geologists (e.g., Marzolf 1969, Freeman 1976) as to their depositional environment, and Young should so inform his readers. Picard (1977), for example, disagrees with some of the alternate depositional environments proposed for the Navajo Sandstone, but, unlike Young, he makes clear that his preference for eolian deposition is an interpretation, not a fact.

If Young may be faulted for providing a polemic rather than the even-handed evaluation anticipated, his book may not, on that account, be lightly dismissed. To begin with, Young is somewhat unique among geologists holding an ancient-Earth view in that he also holds a very high view of Scripture. "The Bible is true, it is infallible, it is without error no matter what our theories of geology may be" (p 151). Furthermore, he is a practicing geologist who has published in his discipline and has also addressed, in print, the difficult issue of the relation between geology and the Genesis narrative (Young 1977). Young therefore represents an informed, Christian viewpoint that merits consideration.

The problems presented in *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* are real problems that have yet to be resolved with great satisfaction. Some are less serious than Young believes, others are indeed problematic, but none may be ignored. His perceptions merit attention and response.

REFERENCES

- Freeman WE. 1976. Regional stratigraphy and depositional environments of the Glen Canyon Group and Carmel Formation (San Rafael Group). Rocky Mountain Association of Geologists 1976 Symposium, p 247-259.
- Marzolf JE. 1969. Regional stratigraphic variations in primary features of the Navajo Sandstone, Utah. Geological Society of America Abstracts with Programs for 1969, part 3, p 40.
- Picard MD. 1977. Navajo Sandstone (Jurassic) of Utah and northern Arizona — eolian or marine in origin? American Association of Petroleum Geologists Bulletin 61(8):1386.
- Young DA. 1977. Creation and the flood. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.