

Fairness in reviews

[We present here excerpts of Paul Marston's letter containing some important criticisms of a review of his book.—Ed.]

Andrew Kulikovsky's review¹ of our book *Reason, Science and Faith* raises some valid points, but also contains various factual inaccuracies.

Issues of history

Our overall claim on the history of interpretation of Genesis is that if we look at the great figures of early Jewish and Christian scholarship, *well before modern geology or Darwinism*, then literalism is not usual. Kulikovsky asserts that

'whilst it is true that a few church leaders held to non-literal creation days, they were most certainly the minority and their interpretations were definitely not the mainstream position.'

We refer to a paper by Justin Marston now published as 'Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis 1–3' in *Science and Christian Belief* 12(2):127–150, 2000. This identified the broad categories of 'Philosophical', 'Exegetical' and 'Mystical' within early Jewish thinking, arguing that from the first century onwards leading Jewish thinkers were not literal in the understanding they had of their literature.

In counter, Kulikovsky can cite only Josephus, who was cited in Justin's article and who actually says that Moses wrote 'some things enigmatically, some allegorically, and the rest in plain words'. Josephus treatment (in *Antiquities*) on Genesis 1 is a simple narrative until in 1.2 he says: 'Moses, after the seventh day was over, begins to talk philosophically ...'—though apparently continues to give a straight narrative account. How then can Kulikovsky claim that Josephus 'certainly held to a literal view'? He complains that Philo was a 'Hellenistic Jew' (as arguably was St Paul who used

some similar language on Adam) and that he and early Christian teachers were influenced by Platonic and other ideas. Of course they were; this is the point. Their total commitment to the inspiration of the Genesis accounts did *not* mean that they tried to derive what we would call their 'scientific' ideas from them. But if central figures like Clement, Origen and Augustine are to be dismissed as irrelevant, who *are* supposed to be relevant to the issue of what the church historically believed? He admits we

'point out a number of occasions where various fathers adopted a metaphorical interpretation of other elements in the creation account, claiming that this is proof that the majority did not accept a literal interpretation.'

So why is this either a 'straw man argument' or 'disingenuous'? He says that of course YEC accept the presence of metaphor, but that there 'needs to be a good contextual reason for interpreting "day" as anything other than a normal day'. Well both Origen and Augustine (generally regarded as the greatest of the Greek and Latin Fathers) plainly thought that there *was* such reason, and neither were influenced by Lyell or Darwin. The issue was whether general 'traditional' views were literalistic—what we cite proves that they were not.

On geology, we would claim:

1. The 19th century saw a development of empirical geology until the present geological column was established by the mid-1850s (before Darwin's *Origin* in 1859).
2. Those who constructed the column neither accepted evolution nor assumed it. Many of them were Christians, some evangelicals, and 'anti-biblical' motives were rare.
3. In the 1820–30s there was a brief flurry of 'Scriptural Geologists', a few of whom had geological expertise. By 1855 these ideas were universally rejected by Christian theologians and scientists.

Kulikovsky admits that the geological column had been published

prior to Darwin's *Origin of Species* but seems to try to imply that evolution influenced it. He says:

'it is also true that evolution and evolutionary ideas were circulating before Darwin (e.g. the schemes proposed by Lamarck, Erasmus Darwin, etc.)'

Of course they were, but the major figures who established the geological column had rejected such ideas. Then he says that Lyell was 'warm to the idea of evolution' although publicly opposed, and notes that he did 'come to accept Darwinian evolution'. Well the openness of Lyell's earlier letters certainly does not show that evolutionary ideas played any part in his geology at that time, and his eventual acceptance of Darwinism (with caveats on human evolution) came *well after* the geological column had been established. All this bears out our point that evolutionary assumption played no part in the construction of the geological column.

Exegetical issues

Exegetical, as against historical, issues are harder to identify as demonstrably right or wrong. I remain of the view that we should note that our Lord deliberately chose to use a parable approach for much of his teaching; He was frequently misunderstood to be speaking literally when He was speaking metaphorically, and He seldom expounded explicitly the meanings of His parables. Consistent application of the kind of hermeneutic Kulikovsky advocates is simply not possible—and in practice neither Henry Morris nor anyone else achieves it. I will, however, comment on some of Kulikovsky's points which are incorrect or misleading. First, he describes as 'exegetical gymnastics' our account of the Fall:

'The "tree of life" and the "serpent" are viewed as symbolic (of what?); all references to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1–4 are merely generic references to humankind; and the whole story is taken as a divinely inspired allegory.'

The ‘of what’ is particularly puzzling since *RS&F* contains extended analysis of the ‘serpent’ taken by most commentators to symbolise Satan, and the ‘tree of life’ has a figurative meaning throughout Scripture (as cited on p. 279). We do *not* adopt the view that references to Adam and Eve are all ‘merely generic references to humankind’. The nearest we come to this is on p. 443: ‘The Adam-Eve-Cain-Abel story may relate to particular benchmark individuals, but they are also the story of mankind.’ Ironically, having ascribed to us the view that it is *nothing but* allegory, Kulikovsky then berates us for suggesting that Adam and Eve may be both symbolic elements *and* historical figures. Beyond this, to see what we really say anyone can read our book, but please don’t rely on Kulikovsky.

Concluding invitation

Our work is not flawless and we make no claim to infallibility. However, many of the specific criticisms made by Kulikovsky are factually incorrect and insupportable. All that we would urge is that people—particularly those who share our evangelical faith and personal devotion to Jesus who is the truth—read the book and make up their own minds.

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Andrew Kulikovsky replies

In his response to my review of *Reason, Science and Faith*, Marston simply repeats what he and Forster originally wrote in their book. He again appeals to his son Justin’s paper

on early Jewish interpretations, and objects to my citation of Josephus as believing in literal creation days. Yet, Marston himself admits that Josephus ‘apparently continues to give a straight narrative account’. Indeed, Josephus wrote:

[God] named the beginning of light, and the time of rest, *The Evening* and *The Morning*, and this was indeed the first day ... Accordingly Moses says, that in just six days the world, and all that is therein, was made. And that the seventh day was a rest, and a release from the labor of such operations; whence it is that we Celebrate a rest from our labors on that day, and call it the Sabbath, which word denotes *rest* in the Hebrew tongue.¹

Furthermore, Josephus is not the only contrary view I cited. I also referred them to the Talmudic commentators whom Marston again unfortunately ignores.

Likewise, regarding the interpretations of the early Church Fathers, Marston appears to believe that repeating the same errors over and over somehow makes them valid. My original review cited more reliable surveys of the early Christian beliefs which he and Forster seem to have ignored. In fact, even Davis Young—a professional geologist and a Christian who is staunchly anti-YEC—concludes from his own survey that

‘the concept of a recent creation was a virtually unanimous belief of the early church ... Many of the church fathers plainly regarded the six days as ordinary days.’²

Again, Philo was a Hellenistic Jew who sought to harmonise the Torah with Greek philosophy by subverting it to Stoic, Pythagorean, and especially Platonic thought. Unlike Philo, the Apostle Paul was NOT a Hellenistic Jew. He identified himself as the most zealous of Pharisees (Acts 22:3–5; 23:6; 26:4–5). Thus, Philo’s commitment was to Greek philosophy which involved a program of allegorical interpretation, not to ‘the inspiration of the Genesis accounts’. Indeed, Philo is never quoted by the classical Jewish

sources, nor is he mentioned by Jewish medieval philosophers. The only people who accepted his views were the Alexandrian School including Clement and Origen, who influenced Augustine. Thus, Origen and Augustine did not believe there was good contextual reason to interpret allegorically because allegorical interpretation was at the core of their interpretive methodology! Moreover, I never argued that the Church Fathers’ interpretations were strictly ‘literalistic’ but rather, that they held to *literal creation days*.

In response to Marston’s question about which sources are supposed to be relevant to the issue of what the church historically believed, I refer him back to my original review which cites two other extensive and reliable surveys.

Marston also appears to be confused about my criticisms of their survey of the history of geology. My main argument was that old-earth geology resulted from the rejection of Scriptural authority rather than the acceptance of evolution—although evolutionary ideas would certainly have played some part in subverting biblical authority, especially with regard to Hutton and Lyell.

Numerous works on Flood geology were published by early geologists in the 17th and 18th century. Niels Steensen (1638–1686) established the principle that sedimentary rock layers were deposited in a successive and generally horizontal fashion, and stated his belief in a 6,000 year old earth and that organic fossils and rock strata were laid down by the Flood of Noah.³ Thomas Burnet (1635–1715) and William Whiston (1667–1752), put forward theories on how the Noahican Flood laid down the earth’s surface structure.⁴ John Woodward (1665–1722) invoked the Flood to explain the strata and fossils in *An Essay Toward a Natural History of the Earth* (1695).⁵ Alexander Catcott (1725–1779), in his *Treatise on the Deluge* (1768) invoked geological arguments to defend the Genesis account of a recent creation and a global Flood which produced the geological record,⁵ and Richard Kirwan (1733–1812) advocated Flood geology in *Geological Essays* (1799).

Even Davis Young acknowledges that Flood geology ‘was not the aberrant theory of a fringe group; it was mainstream natural history and was espoused by some of the ablest naturalists of the time.’⁶ He explains:

‘In diluvialism, Scripture provided the main outline of terrestrial history. The writings of classical historians and scattered empirical evidence from the earth provided secondary sources of information that helped fill in the detail and were believed to corroborate the biblical accounts. The biblical scheme of creation, fall, flood, and final consummation provided the main events in earth history, and the biblical materials relating to these events were typically understood in literal terms. The creation was assumed to be a recent creation in six ordinary days, and the flood was assumed to be global. Typically, the Noahic flood was the centerpiece around which the various speculative theories of the earth were constructed.’⁷

However, as a result of enlightenment thinking, geology became increasingly secularized. Thus, James Hutton, a deist, proclaimed that

‘the past history of our globe must be explained by what can be seen to be happening now ... No powers are to be employed that are not natural to the globe, no action to be admitted except those of which we know the principle.’⁸

And in an unpublished paper written in 1794, Hutton clearly advocated a form of evolution by natural selection.⁹

Charles Lyell revived Hutton’s ideas and, like Hutton, was deistic in thought.¹⁰ He also was not concerned with harmonizing his views with Scripture, but saw himself as ‘the spiritual savior of geology, freeing the science from the old dispensation of Moses’.¹¹ In fact, American old-earth geologist, Edward Hitchcock who was a contemporary of Lyell, argued that both Lyell and the French geologists were hostile toward the Bible, which very much affected

their interpretation of the Noahian Flood and the geological evidence.¹² Furthermore, Lyell’s uniformitarianism applied not only to geology, but to biology as well. His private letters show that, as early as 1827, he believed in or at least was warm to the idea of evolution, although he initially refused to accept that humans had evolved from apes.¹³

Thus, while the geological column had been published prior to Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, the old-earth timescales were ascribed to it during a period when the intellectual climate was either hostile or indifferent to the authority of the Bible.

Regarding my exegetical criticisms, Marston argues that because Jesus spoke in parables which were not always understood by His audience, it is wrong to take the text of Genesis literally, and impossible to do so consistently anyway. But such reasoning is fallacious. What do Jesus’ parables have to do with the text of Genesis? They are totally different genres! Furthermore, I do not hold to a literalistic hermeneutic—I hold to the standard historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Marston appears unable to see the difference between a literalistic hermeneutic and the belief in literal creation days. His charge of literalism is a straw-man.

Marston writes: ‘We do not adopt the view that references [in Genesis 1–4] to Adam and Eve are all “merely generic references to humankind”. However, Marston appears to have forgotten what he and Forster wrote on pages 283–285 of their book. There they quite clearly argue that in Genesis 1–4 Adam and Eve were indeed generic references to humankind as opposed to actual individuals.

Furthermore, Marston does not appear to understand my objection to Adam and Eve both being elements of an allegory which correspond to historical parties (be it individuals or generic references to men and women). Allegorical elements normally *do* correspond to actual parties or events, but allegorical stories always employ *totally different symbols* to represent those parties or events. In other words,

if ‘Adam’ or ‘man’ is an element in an allegorical story, then these allegorical elements cannot be representative of the first man or humankind. If they do then the account is, by definition, not an allegory. This is illustrated by the real allegory in Daniel 8.

In conclusion, I can only suggest that one compares Marston’s book with what I have said and with what leading creationists have said.

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