

A balanced treatment??

A review of
Three Views on Creation and Evolution.
 Edited by J.P. Moreland and
 John Mark Reynolds
 Zondervan Publishing
 House, 1999

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This book puts forward the three most popular views on creation and evolution held by evangelical Christians today: *Young Earth Creationism* (YEC), which is presented by Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds, *Old Earth (Progressive) Creationism* (OEC), which is presented by Robert C. Newman, and *Theistic Evolution* (TE), which is presented by Howard J. Van Till.

The appointment of Newman and Van Till to represent their respective positions is not surprising, but the selection of Nelson and Reynolds to represent YEC is completely baffling, since neither is a particularly well-known or high profile defender of that position. I do not mean to imply that Nelson and Reynolds do not actually believe in a young earth or that they are completely incompetent. Rather, I mean to say that they are not really the best or most informed people to argue for the YEC position, since that position is based primarily on the text of Scripture, yet both Nelson and Reynolds are philosophers with no formal qualifications in biblical studies. Indeed, in one of the responses to their presentation, the author states:

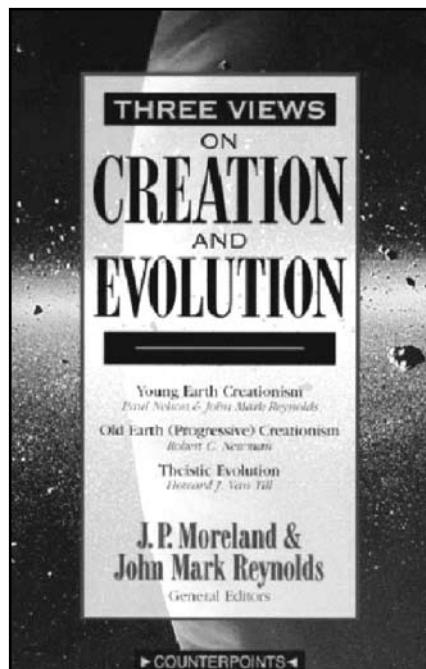
*'The essay's greatest weakness, however, lies in how briefly it actually discusses the Bible. More discussion is needed on this, since it is crucial that young earth theorists make sure whether the Bible unequivocally supports a young earth.'*¹

Another responder noted that they '*do not argue exegetically for a literal-day view*' and that they '*do not seriously grapple with the comprehensive body of scientific evidence for an old earth ...*'²

Therefore, a better combination would include a biblical studies scholar and a geologist or physicist. There are many obvious candidates, including Douglas Kelly, David Fouts, John J. Davis,³ and David Shackelford (biblical studies); along with physicist Russell Humphreys, astronomer Danny Faulkner, or geologists Steve Austin and Andrew Snelling, to name just a few.

Although this volume is part of Zondervan's 'Counterpoints' series, its format is significantly different from the other nine volumes currently available in that series. All the other volumes allow each contributor to critique the other views as well as presenting their own view. This is generally regarded as the fairest way of presenting alternative views and interpretations. However, this particular volume is arranged quite differently. Each contribution is followed by responses from a scientist (Walter Bradley), a theologian (John Jefferson Davis), a philosopher (J.P. Moreland), and a biblical studies/hermeneutics expert (Vern Sheridan Poythress). The problem here is that all four of these responders favour OEC. Walter Bradley is a well known Old Earth/Progressive Creationist (p. 79) and J.P. Moreland admits that he leans strongly toward an Old Earth Creationist view (pp. 85, 142).⁴ John Jefferson Davis states that his own view is closest to Newman's Old Earth/Progressive Creationism (p. 137), and although Vern Poythress makes no explicit statement about his own view, his response clearly indicates that he favours OEC. Since the same four respond to each position, it is hardly a fair or balanced treatment.

In their contribution, Nelson and Reynolds present the standard YEC



interpretations of the days of creation, the Fall and the global Flood. Being philosophers, they both admit that the arguments they know best are from the philosophy of science and biology. However, since none of these arguments relates directly to the question of the age of the earth, Old Earth creationists are generally in full agreement, as Bradley also notes (p. 76).

Nelson and Reynolds also make a few surprising comments. When discussing the issue of animal death before the Fall, they write: '*With skilful argumentation this bloody history could perhaps be made consistent with the purposes of a wise and loving Creator*' (p. 47). I would suggest that the only way such a view could be made consistent is by excising a considerable amount of Scripture from the canon!

They also state: '*Natural science at the moment seems to overwhelmingly point to an old cosmos*' (p. 49). This is a very bold statement from a couple of philosophers who admit that the arguments they know best are from philosophy and biology, which do not relate directly to the age of the earth. In fact, quite the opposite is true: the vast majority of dating methods indicate a relatively young earth.^{5,6} What they probably should have said is '*The overwhelming consensus among scientists*

at the moment is that the cosmos is old.' They also suggest that accepting YEC over OEC is not as important as fighting evolution. However, I would suggest that both are equally important since the acceptance of OEC puts a big question mark over the authority, inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture.

In regard to scientific methodology, Nelson and Reynolds correctly point out that people frequently fail to take into account the distinction between observations and the conclusions based on those observations (p. 69). People are far too trusting and far too willing to uncritically accept whatever scientists happen to say.

In summary, Nelson and Reynolds seem more intent on highlighting the points of agreement between YEC and OEC, rather than pointing out the disagreements and providing well reasoned, logical arguments for why those differences exist. The result is a very weak, limp, and defensive presentation. An uninformed reader would most definitely be left with the impression that YEC is merely a philosophic specula-

tion which has virtually no biblical or scientific support — yet nothing could be further from the truth.

In his response to Nelson and Reynolds, Walter Bradley attempts to cast doubt upon the Young Earth Creationist claim of no animal death before the Fall, by arguing that stomach bacteria necessarily involves death (p. 77). However, this is a straw-man argument. To be frank, it is common courtesy to learn what people *actually teach* before criticising them (but to be fair, the choice of creationist spokesmen might not have given him the chance, at least as far as the book was concerned). The major creationist organisations like *Answers in Genesis* and the *Institute for Creation Research* have *never taught* that *plants, microbes or individual cells* didn't die before the Fall, but only *nephesh* (soul) creatures.

The Bible is clear that plants do **not** have life in the sense of *nephesh*, while animals do. This should be obvious from Gen. 1:29–30, which clearly ordained vegetarianism for both humans and animals before the Fall. Even introductory creationist publications such as *The Answers Book*, *The Genesis Record*, *The Lie: Evolution*, as well as the pioneering creationist book *The Genesis Flood*, point this out, as frequently does the layman's magazine *Creation*.

It is likely that only vertebrates are *nephesh*. This is hinted at in the Genesis account of the global Flood and Ark. The Hebrew words for the animals taken into the Ark do not include invertebrates,⁷ and only those creatures off the Ark that *breathed through nostrils* were completely wiped out by the Flood (Gen. 7:22). Insects breathe through tubes called *tracheae* that exit coming from holes in their exoskeleton.

Bradley also claims the interpretation of a physical Fall is problematic, because

Adam and Eve did not die as soon as they ate the forbidden fruit. But Genesis 2:17 is best explained by taking the promise of death in an *ingressive* sense. In other words, the focus is on the beginning of the action of dying, which results in the translation '*...for when you eat of it you will surely begin to die.*'

From his faulty understanding, Bradley argues that the death spoken of in Genesis 2:17 is spiritual death only, not physical death. But Gen. 3:19 indicates that *physical* death was part of the punishment. Also, 1 Cor. 15:21–22 contrasts the death that came through the first Adam with the life that came through the last Adam, Jesus Christ. Since Jesus died *physically* and was *bodily* resurrected, the death that came through Adam must also have been physical.

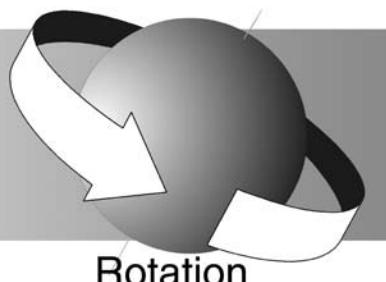
Also, dividing death into physical and spiritual aspects creates a false dichotomy. The Bible doesn't actually use the term 'spiritual death', and taking it literally, it would imply that our spirit has died. But this would ultimately mean that the very thing that differentiates man from animal is no longer living. Following this logic, one is forced to conclude that an unsaved person is no longer a reflection of the image of God, but is, in fact, no different from an animal. Such a view of death is also incompatible with what Hebrews 9:27 teaches: man is destined to die once, and then he faces judgement. We are characterised as being dead or dead in our sins only in the sense that our physical death is absolutely certain.

Rather, the Fall caused a breakdown in the relationship and communion between God and man, as excellently discussed in Francis Schaeffer's book *Genesis in Space and Time*.⁸ While many people use the term 'spiritual death' to mean something like this, I suggest that it would be better to drop the term and state the fact directly.

Furthermore, Bradley also claims there is overwhelming scientific evidence for an old earth (p. 78). However, virtually all the so-called 'evidence' for an old earth is derived from uniformitarian geology and big-bang cosmol-



The fact that vegetation and microbes are not considered to have 'nephesh' life means their digestion when eaten did not constitute death prior to the fall.



Light Source

The sun, moon and stars were not needed to delineate the ‘days’ of creation. All that is required is a light source and rotation.

ogy, both of which are full of unproven and unprovable assumptions and speculations. I wonder whether Bradley, whose scientific qualifications are in engineering and materials science, really understands just how unscientific the so-called evidence really is?

John Jefferson Davis criticises Nelson and Reynolds for not dealing with the hominid fossil record, but his claim that '*these extinct hominid forms displayed characteristics intermediate between modern man and earlier primates*' (p. 81) demonstrates his complete ignorance of the facts. The fossil record includes both australopithecines and humans, but nothing that could be called 'intermediate' or even 'mosaic'.⁹

In regard to the teaching of Genesis 1, he claims that the biblical writers were more concerned with the results of God's creative work rather than with material processes (p. 82). But if this was the case, then only the very first verse would have been needed! In any case, Genesis 1 makes it clear that God spoke and things came into being: '*And God said ... And it was so.*' He also claims that Genesis communicates theological truths about God against a backdrop of polytheistic ancient near eastern cultures, and chastises Nelson and Reynolds for not doing a careful analysis of the religious and cultural context of the ancient near east (p. 82). However, it would seem that Davis has not done a careful *historical* analysis. Genesis was most probably penned by Moses during the 40 years of wandering in the desert, after 400 years of slavery in Egypt, so it is highly unlikely that the Israelites would have been aware of other ancient near eastern crea-

tion accounts. Furthermore, when in Egypt, the Israelites lived in segregation (except for Moses), so it is also unlikely that they were influenced by the Egyptians.

In his response, Vern Poythress also claims that God is primarily interested in attacking polytheism and pagan myths (p. 91) but offers no support for this assertion. This is not surprising since the creation account contains not the slightest hint of polemic.

Poythress rightly points out that phenomenological language is often misunderstood as teaching incorrect science (p. 91). But while the concept of phenomenological language has not escaped Poythress' attention, it appears that logic and the larger biblical context have. In his discussion of the flood narrative (pp. 91–92), Poythress appeals to phenomenological language as an explanation for the apparent universal nature of the language employed. Yet simple logic would show that a local or limited flood is not permitted by the text. For example, Poythress must explain how a free-standing column of water deep enough to cover the highest mountains in the area, could remain in existence for any length of time, let alone a year! In addition, 2 Peter 3:5–7 makes it abundantly clear that the flood was global, and it was endorsed by Christ Himself in Luke 17:26–27. For a professional scholar who is trained in both hermeneutics and logic, such oversights are inexcusable.

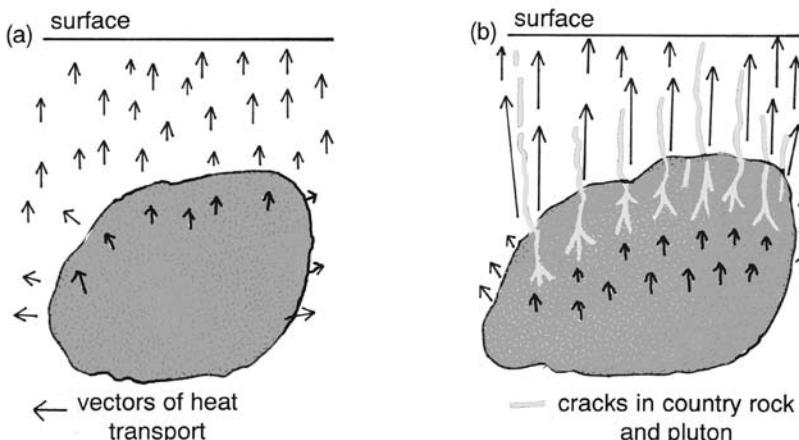
Poythress also claims the 24-hour interpretation of the days of creation is naive and that careful grammatical-historical interpretation leads to a different conclusion (p. 92). Unfortunately, he again offers no exegetical support for

this assertion. In fact, careful historical-grammatical interpretation would lead the interpreter to notice that whenever 'day' is used with a number it always refers to a literal 24-hour day, and that the use of evening and morning also suggests a literal 24-hour day. As with most interpreters who reject the literal day view, Poythress also asserts that day seven is unending, but again offers no exegetical substantiation. In fact, in his response to Newman, he completely contradicts himself by arguing that the Hebrew tenses used in Genesis 2:2–3 indicate that the seventh day is in the past (p. 149).¹⁰ But if the seventh day is in the past, how can it also be unending?

He also claims that on the basis of Exodus 20:11, the creation week is analogous to, not identical with, man's work week (p. 93). However, the use of the Hebrew conjunction *ki* ('for') at the beginning of this verse clearly indicates that the days of creation form the very basis of the working week, rather than being an analogy. Indeed, if the reference to the six days were merely an analogy, and 'day' can refer to an indefinite period of time, then the reader would be unable to determine the exact meaning of this command. Does God intend man to work for six days, six weeks, six months or six years before he is to rest?

Concerning the creation of the lights on day four, Poythress argues that because they marked the length of days, we have no business trying to calculate the length of the first three days (p. 93). But Poythress apparently overlooks the fact that God Himself performed the duty of dividing the light from the darkness for the first three days (Gen. 1:4–5).

Regarding the order of the days, Poythress suggests they are partly topical rather than purely chronological (p. 93). But Poythress seems to be completely unaware that the text of Genesis 1 is typical Hebrew narrative which clearly indicates chronological sequence (Poythress is actually a New Testament scholar). Indeed, each day begins and ends with a *waw* consecutive imperfect verb,¹¹ making the



Cooling of a pluton by (a) conduction or (b) convection. Vectors are proportional to the rate of heat flow to the surface (from Snelling and Woodmorappe).¹²

chronological sequence explicit and undeniable.

Overall, Poythress' response to Nelson and Reynolds is a particularly poor showing, considering it comes from a professional scholar trained in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics. His arguments are shallow, and his criticisms are more often than not, invalid. He clearly does not have an adequate grasp of the exegetical issues and concerns in the creation account.

In his presentation of OEC, Robert Newman cites the large amount of time required for once-molten rocks to cool (p. 110). However, Newman is apparently unaware of the research performed by both young earth¹² and secular scientists^{13,14} in recent years showing that such rocks could have cooled in only a few thousand years, instead of millions of years.

Although Newman affirms that in relation to both science and biblical studies, the data should always take precedence over theory (p. 124), it is unfortunate that he fails to put this into practice when exegeting the text of Genesis. For example, regarding animal death before the Fall, Newman states: '*Nothing is said one way or the other about animal death in the Genesis account*' (p. 111). But this is surely a very blinkered view of the text. Both man and animals were permitted to eat only plants (Gen. 1:29–30), so there would be no death as a result of carnivorous activity from either man or other

animals. In addition, there is nothing in the text to suggest that animals would have died from disease or old age.

In addition, Poythress points out that Newman's modified 'intermittent day' view of Genesis 1 unnecessarily entangles him in a number of interpretative mistakes (pp. 148–149), and adds '*the alleged "biblical hints" of an old earth are quite weak and should be dropped from the argument*' (p. 151). Poythress also highlights Newman's premature move from general revelation to the problematic idea of natural theology, pointing out that such an idea regularly underestimates the radical effects of sin on the minds of human beings (pp. 151–152).

Newman also fails to interact with the sophisticated scientific models proposed by various young earth creationists. Nowhere does he mention John Baumgardner's Catastrophic Plate Tectonics model,^{15,16} Michael Oard's post-Flood Ice Age model,¹⁷ or Russ Humphreys' White Hole Cosmology.¹⁸

Howard Van Till expresses his extreme discomfort with the title 'Theistic Evolution' as a description of his view. He would much prefer the title 'Fully Gifted Creation.' (pp. 161, 240). But Van Till's position is indeed that of Theistic Evolution! The title 'Fully Gifted Creation' is preferable presumably because it disassociates his position from the well-known problems and negative connotations of TE, but in reality it is

a simple case of semantic subterfuge. However, the four responders were not fooled and rightly rejected his view.

The book concludes with summary essays from Richard Bube and Phillip Johnson. Bube, a theistic evolutionist, mischaracterises YEC as holding to a 'completely literal' or 'literalistic' interpretation, giving the (false) impression that young earth creationists do not allow for any use of non-literal terms or literary devices in the text. He also claims that YEC has fundamental problems in the area of biblical interpretation (p. 251), but, in keeping with the rest of the book, does not bother to cite any examples. He concludes by writing:

'How tragic it often is when Christians, seeking to avoid the errors of evolutionism, promulgate the falsehood that the efficacy of faith in the atonement of Christ effectively depends upon the dogmatic acceptance of creationism and the dogmatic rejection of any evolutionary processes as descriptions of God's activity in establishing creation' (p. 266).

The leading creationist spokesmen make it clear that they don't claim one must believe in a literal creation to be saved. But they rightly maintain that Bube and those like him fail to realise that their view completely undermines the *logical* need for Christ's death (stated, as previously mentioned, in e.g. 1 Cor. 15)! Fortunately many people are saved despite their holding logically inconsistent views — 'blessed inconsistency'. His comment also says something about his grasp of basic theology, since Christ's death achieved far more than atonement, which is merely a covering (Hebrew *kaphar*) for sin. Christ's death was also substitution for sin (Isa. 53, Matt. 20:28), redemption or full release (Matt. 20:28, 2 Pet. 2:1), reconciliation of man and God (2 Cor. 5:19), and propitiation or satisfying God's wrath (1 John 2:2).

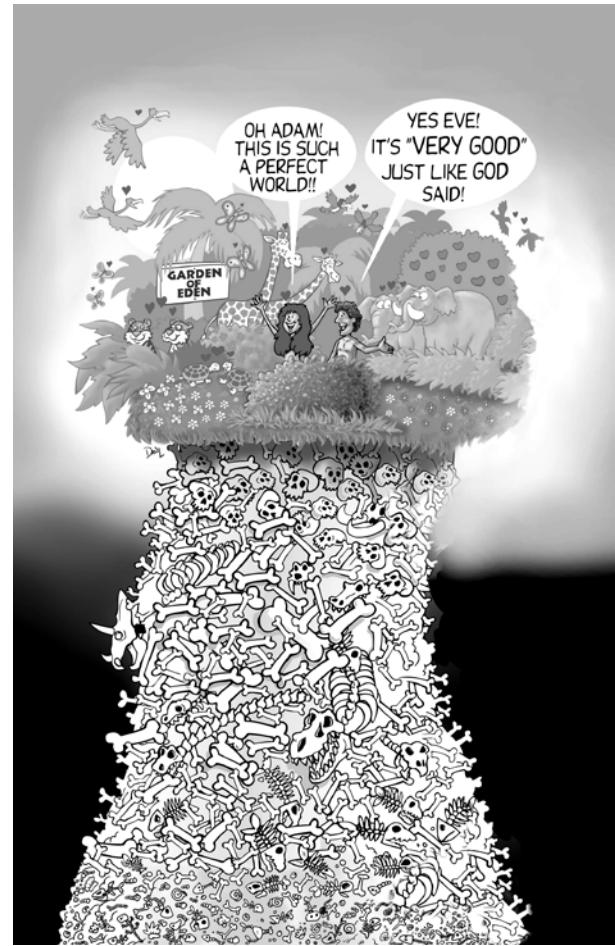
Phillip Johnson's comments are much more reasonable. He acknowledges that YEC honours the Scriptures and that the absence of death before sin makes sense theologically (p. 277).

Although he believes that YEC faces insurmountable scientific problems, he admits that he is not too familiar with geological evidence and radiometric dating that supposedly indicates an old earth. Johnson also agrees with young earth creationists that the idea of God stepping in at various points in history in order to create new genetic information is somewhat awkward. He admits that he is dissatisfied with all the present solutions (p. 276), but states that he is ‘open to persuasion’ (p. 277).

There are many more problems, incorrect statements and instances of poor logic in this volume, but the ones I have documented should suffice to demonstrate the general (poor) quality of the submissions. It is unfortunate that many uninformed readers will buy this book thinking they are getting a balanced treatment of the issue. Given that the selection of contributors and responders is clearly biased toward Old Earth (Progressive) Creationism, this is obviously not the case. Indeed, there is no openly critical response at all to this view. Thus, it is not surprising that it comes out looking far more attractive than either Young Earth Creationism or Theistic Evolution.

References

1. Vern Sheridan Poythress, Response to Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds, p. 90.
2. John Jefferson Davis, Response to Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds, p. 82.
3. Not to be confused with John Jefferson Davis. John J. Davis is an Old Testament scholar, author of *Paradise to Prison*, and a young earth creationist.
4. Moreland does at least admit the possibility of a young earth.
5. Humphreys, D.R., Evidence for a young world, *Creation* 13(3):28–31, 1991.
6. Morris, J.D., *The Young Earth*, Creation Life Pub., Master Books Div., Colorado Springs, CO, 1994.
7. Woodmorappe, J., *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study*, Institute for Creation Research, Santee, CA, USA, 1996.
8. Schaeffer, F.A., *Genesis in Space and Time: The Flow of Biblical History*, IVP, Downers Grove, IL, 1972.
9. Woodmorappe, J., Non-transitions in ‘human fossils’ — on evolutionists’ terms, *CEN Tech.* J. 13(2):10–12, 1999.
10. In actual fact, Poythress is incorrect on this point as well. For a full discussion of this verse and its quotation in Hebrews 4, see Kulikovsky, A.S., God’s rest in Hebrews 4:1–11, *CEN Tech. J.* 13(2):61–62, 1999.
11. Many verses in English translations of Genesis 1–11, especially in the Genesis 1 creation account and the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11, start with ‘And’. While this might seem like awkward English, it is excellent Hebrew, the language God inspired the writer of Genesis to use. Here, in Hebrew, the ‘and’ is formed by attaching the letter *waw* (w), the Hebrew letter w, to the front (i.e. right, because Hebrew reads right to left) of a Hebrew imperfect verb form. The particular grammar indicates events happening *in sequence* (consecutively). Hence this construction is called the *waw consecutive*. This is conclusive proof that Genesis should be read as a straightforward historical account of real events happening in a definite order. ‘...progress in the sequence of time, is regularly indicated by a pregnant and (called *waw consecutive*) ...’, Kautzsch, E., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed, translated by Cowley, A.E., Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 133, 1910.
12. Snelling, A.A. and Woodmorappe, J., The cooling of thick igneous bodies on a young Earth, *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference on Creationism*, Walsh, R.E., (ed.), Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, pp. 527–545, 1998.
13. Cathles, L.M., An analysis of the cooling of intrusives by groundwater convection which includes boiling, *Economic Geology* 72:804–826, 1977.
14. Cathles, L.M., Fluid-flow and genesis of hydrothermal ore deposits, *Economic Geology*: 75th Anniversary Volume, Skinner B.J., (ed.), pp. 424–457, 1981.
15. Baumgardner, J.R., Computer modeling of the large-scale tectonics associated with the Genesis Flood, *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Creationism*, Pittsburgh, PA, Walsh, R.E., (ed.), Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, pp. 49–62, 1994.
16. Baumgardner, J.R., Runaway subduction as the driving mechanism for the Genesis Flood, *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Creationism*, Pittsburgh, PA, Walsh, R.E., (ed.), Creation Science Fellowship, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, pp. 63–75, 1994.
17. Oard, M.J., *An Ice Age Caused by the Genesis Flood*, Institute for Creation Research, El Cajon, CA, 1990.
18. Humphreys, D.R., *Starlight and Time*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 1994.



The logical conclusion of combining any ‘old-earth’ approach with Genesis.