

Worldviews, history, and earth's age—part 2

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Despite claims of contemporary Christian scholars, history demonstrates that an old earth has been detrimental to the church over the last few centuries. Until the 18th century, the church was practically unanimous in accepting young-earth history. The concept of prehistory grounded in geology originated among Enlightenment deists and atheists and not from within the church. The church's capitulation to deep time has led to theological novelty, often to the point of affecting essential Christian doctrine. As such, the old-earth paradigm has weakened both the church and the culture in the West. Galileo and geocentrism are falsely presented as arguments for a superior authority for science, and by extension an old earth, but geocentrism and deep time are vastly different issues. The conflict between the old-earth paradigm and Christianity is inevitable because the old-earth paradigm is intrinsically rooted in naturalism.

Many Christian academics and theologians since the late 18th century have embraced an old earth, claiming that it is compatible with Christianity.¹ Even many conservative Christian scholars have embraced this idea.² They think deep time and Christianity must be reconciled at all costs. The result is almost scripted; scientists put forward the latest version of the old-earth paradigm using 'scientific evidence',³⁻⁵ and theologians meekly fall into line, changing Genesis to accommodate it.⁶⁻⁸

But the old-earth paradigm involves much more than a quantitative age. It was a dramatic departure from the doctrine of creation, as can be seen in its origin with an aggressive secular intelligentsia, who used 'science' to mask their unbelief.⁹ This occurred sooner and faster than many realize. Prior to 1800:

"[Christian naturalist Jean André] De Luc [(1727–1817)] was well aware that to mention Genesis at all in a 'philosophical' or scientific work was to invite a kneejerk reaction from many other savants. Far from expressing a view that was triumphantly dominant in his culture (as often portrayed by modern historical myth making), de Luc as a self-consciously Christian philosopher regarded himself as one of an embattled minority, indeed as part of a minority within a minority."¹⁰

In the centuries following the Newtonian revolution, Christian theologians did not subject science to a thorough theological analysis, and, more importantly, they allowed their enemies to define 'science' so as to obfuscate its true dependence on the truth of Scripture.¹¹ As a result, theologians no longer fought secularism; they simply argued over how far to retreat. Those who opposed Darwin still accepted Lyell, not recognizing their fundamental interdependence. This pattern continues—creationists argue for orthodoxy; other Christians affirm an old earth. Despite the gains of

creationism, most professional theologians reject it, impeding lasting and significant reform in the church.

We believe that the old-earth paradigm is wrong, and that a new line of argument is warranted for the sake of Christians who feel constrained to accept it by 'scientific evidence' they do not understand. We have previously shown that the Christian case for an old earth is severely weakened by virtue of its compatibility with naturalism and its incompatibility with Christianity as worldviews.¹² History supplements this logical argument and shows how it has increasingly damaged the integrity of the church's witness over the last few centuries. If the old earth is intrinsic to naturalism, fundamental loyalties require all Christians to abandon it.

Argument from history

While the force of logic is demonstrative (figure 1), there are also powerful arguments from history (figure 2). For many decades, these were obscured by Enlightenment distortions regarding the origin of secular natural history and geology. Much of the 'accepted' history of geology has been shown in recent years to be simplistic, misguided, and slanted.^{13,14} Textbooks that present the origin of geology as an intellectual evolution from James Hutton to John Playfair to Charles Lyell are wrong.¹⁵ The reality is more complex, had more to do with continental naturalists, and is often rife with misrepresentations of those three men.¹⁶

This is important because secular propaganda about the nature of geology is derived from that false history,¹⁶ and subsequent retellings have been marked by anti-Christian bias—slander at worst or theological ignorance at best. Fortunately, a few secular authors have seen some of the problems, and, with a few Christians, have begun to provide more accurate accounts.¹⁷ More importantly, there are a number of positive historical truths that support

the creationist position at the expense of the old-earth paradigm, as summarized below.¹⁸

Earth's age throughout church history

If an old earth is consistent with Christian doctrine, it would have been taught during the Church's first 1,800 years. Scholars have shown the opposite. Almost every major Church Father from the post-Apostolic Age to the Enlightenment advocated a young earth and global Flood.¹⁹⁻²¹ Even those like Augustine, who did not agree with the six-day creation, still affirmed a young earth and global Flood.^{22,23} Some old-earth advocates have taught that earlier theologians left open the possibility of an old earth.²⁴ Others have sought to use the non-historical interpretations of Genesis 1 dotted occasionally throughout church history as a pretext for accepting modern non-historical theories.²⁵ However, scholarship has shown those claims spurious.^{26,27} There only ever appeared to be one 'literal sense' alternative to the historical reading of Genesis prior to the 18th century: instantaneous creation. Some medieval writers combined the two views (creation of all things in an instant, placement of them in creation over a six day period).²⁸ Nevertheless, all this shows is that there were no other options considered. There were two basic reasons: (1) the Bible was viewed as a source of reliable chronological information, as opposed to the speculations of the Egyptians, Persians, and Greeks, and (2) many in the early church believed history before Christ's return would be 6,000 years long, applying Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 to the creation days.²⁹ The second reason was eventually abandoned, but the trust in biblical chronology remained. Therefore, it is now an indisputable fact that the church monolithically affirmed a young earth through its first 18 centuries, which even some old-earth proponents accept.³

Idea originated from deists and atheists

Today's concept of an old cosmos did not originate from Christian theology. Instead, it was the product of Enlightenment intellectuals strongly opposed to orthodox Christianity.¹⁸ An early example was Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788). He introduced this idea in his 1749 *Histoire naturelle*.

“Without being openly atheistic, Buffon had simply redefined the scope of the natural sciences in such a way that divine action was marginalized. ... As for Noah's Flood—which of course had to be placed still later than the seventh epoch—Buffon claimed disingenuously that since it was acknowledged to have been a miracle it was futile to expect it to have left any physical trace, and he consistently declined

to attribute any observable features to its action: diluvial theorizing, at least in its classic form, was eliminated altogether.”³⁰

Another was James Hutton.

“His [Hutton's] theology was openly and unmistakably deistic ... his geothery too is unintelligible except in the light of his deistic theology.”³¹

Despite the tales of older history of geology accounts, neither Hutton nor Lyell was the father of the old-earth paradigm. Lyell embraced it and made sure that it was firmly entrenched in the new geology, with his rigid uniformitarianism, but the concept of an old earth predated Lyell's *Principles* by decades:

“In the opening sentence of his *Alpine Travels* (1779), Saussure claimed that it was universally accepted—he meant, of course, among savants and

Type of Argument	Summary of Argument	
Arguments from history	Enlightenment Distortions	Geology did not originate with Hutton to Playfair to Lyell. Work of many earlier naturalists ignored.
		No empirical time scale. Old earth idea affirmed by intellectuals well before 1800.
		Basic ideas derived in 1700s, not 1800s. Many from Continent, not England.
		Actualism and uniformitarianism not original to Lyell. His genius was conflating method and phil. of history.
		Science was not an Enlightenment discovery defeating Christianity. Science was prior, the child of Christianity.
		'Science vs religion' and 'uniformitarianism vs catastrophism' both distractions from real issues.
Other Historical Arguments		Church affirmed young earth and global Flood for 1800 years. Exceptions were rare, especially among top men.
		Old earth idea originated from from deists and atheists.
		Natural antagonism between two worldviews amply demonstrated in recent centuries.
		Old-earth Christians' ideas are not innovations, but are accommodations. Clear logic, sequence of ideas.
	History shows that compromise of Genesis always leads to weakness in church. Europe good example.	

Figure 1. Summary of the logical arguments linking the old-earth paradigm to naturalism and excluding it from Christianity.

Type of Argument	Summary of Argument
Internal logic of naturalism	Materialism + uniformity = eternal universe. But it is not eternal; materialism and/or uniformity not absolute.
	Materialism implies evolution; evolution implies billions of years. Deep time inherent to naturalism.
	Materialism + positivism = uniformitarianism; implies billions of years. Deep time inherent to naturalism.
	Uniformitarianism = time scale = billions of years. Deep time inherent to naturalism.
	Uniformitarianism = low-energy process = billions of years. Deep time inherent to naturalism.
	Uniformitarianism covers gaps in rock record. Implies billions of years; deep time inherent to naturalism.
Arguments from logic Internal logic of Christianity	Precedence of revelation over human knowledge means God has final word on earth's age.
	Precedence of special revelation over general revelation undermines Christian old-earth case.
	Man's knowledge limited by finitude and sin. Any human case for old earth therefore questionable.
	Purpose of God, His glory through His people, does not require or accommodate an old earth.
	<i>Ex nihilo</i> creation = appearance of age; implies young earth.
	Providence contradicts 'chance and necessity' and thus evolution. No evolution = no need for old earth.
	Providential work of God, both mediate and immediate, contradicts uniformitarianism, thus old earth.
	Bible is complete narrative from beginning of history to its end. Narrative set on young earth.
	Bible presents internal chronology from beginning which presents young earth.
	Revelation tells of global Flood; implies much of rock record in a year; thus young earth.
	Christ and Apostles refer to people and events of the young-earth framework.
	Claim that old earth is from textual considerations alone fails under analysis of text.
	Revelation teaches creation of life, higher life, and man within the space of four days.
	Bible teaches death was result of Adam's sin. Old-earth Christians must reject this teaching.
Cosmos under decay. If old, then inherent. If inherent, it contradicts nature of God and Genesis 1:31.	
God's nature and attributes are contrary to process of evolution over history.	
Related logical arguments	Old earth arguments assert mere <i>compatibility</i> with Bible. Young earth position asserts <i>consistency</i> with Bible.
	Old earth Christians allow science to speak for history. This suggests positivism, which is inherent to naturalism.

Figure 2. Summary of the historical arguments linking the old-earth paradigm to naturalism and excluding it from Christianity.

other educated readers—that the earth’s past revolutions or major changes had occupied ‘a long succession of ages’ Likewise, Werner commented in print—casually and just in passing—that the Geognostic pile of rock masses must have accumulated ‘in the immense time span ... of our earth’s existence’; and in manuscript notes for his lectures on geognosy he estimated that the whole sequence might represent perhaps a million years. Lavoisier suggested that the ‘period’ (in the sense of frequency) of his hypothetical oscillation of the sea level was perhaps ‘several hundreds of thousands of years’ and since he believed there had already been several such cycles, his conception of the earth’s total timescale must certainly have run into millions And Kant’s well-known earlier conjecture that ‘a series of millions of years and centuries have probably elapsed’ in bringing the universe to its present state was almost a [*sic?*] commonplace among cosmological theorists.”³²

A careful study of the development of geohistory demonstrates that deistic and atheistic intellectuals litter the trail to today’s old-earth consensus.¹⁸ A battle was fought over the authority of Scripture and the church capitulated. Attempts to deny that reality are disingenuous.

Antagonism between naturalism and Christianity

Even animals know to avoid people who kick them around. Yet some Christians seem all too willing to continue to seek favour with secularists, whose worldview has generated a profound antagonism with Christianity for more than two centuries. It was manifested early on. Writing about the Enlightenment, Rudwick noted:

“This pre-evidentiary disposition to reject the Bible is also revealed in a passing comment about the common attitude towards Genesis at the time. It was ‘... ancient Jewish history, often scorned and dismissed by savants hostile to religion ...’”³³

Stark⁹ also describes this animosity. We could mention the treatment of the British Scriptural Geologists,³⁴ the 20th-century arrogance towards Christianity,³⁵ and more contemporary attacks by the ‘new atheists’. In all cases, the worldview conflict is being played out by its secular adherents in a perfectly consistent manner. Unfortunately, many Christians seem unwilling or unable to grasp the nature of the intellectual and spiritual warfare. We should take a lesson from our forefathers. Early Christian apologists defeated Greek philosophy and paganism within a few centuries. Today, we seem to idolize the enemy, and even those Christians who see the conflict despair of

retaking science; instead, they wish to create a parallel discipline!³⁶

Worldview warfare is real. We must acknowledge it, develop argumentative strategies for defeating naturalism, and implement them immediately. And then we must stay the course until victory is assured. In this regard, the history of Christianity is more instructive than the history of science, especially given how it has been distorted by secularists.

Accommodation leads to theological error

If Christianity and naturalism are engaged in a worldview war, why do many Christians seek accommodation? It is a question worthy of analysis, but for now the important point is that they do. Secularists preach uniformitarian prehistory and Christians miraculously discover billions of years in Genesis 1. Secularists teach evolution and Christians suddenly find an evolutionary development of life in the Bible. Secularists argue that the Genesis Flood was a local event, and Christians rush to find the sedimentary remnants of a local flood in the Euphrates River valley³⁷ or the Black Sea.³⁸

During the history of the church, there were cycles into heterodoxy, but within the context of a Christian West. But the current crisis presents a different kind of challenge. It is the challenge of a foreign worldview, not a deviation within the framework of belief. It would be like the early Christians seeking accommodation with pagan philosophy, sacrificing their core understanding of revelation to appease Epicureans, Stoics, Platonists, or Aristotelians. The old-earth paradigm is a door into atheism.

Belief in an old earth requires distortions of Genesis 1.^{39,40} That leads to further distortions in the next ten chapters, and then it cascades throughout the Bible, everywhere that creation or the Flood are mentioned. If the church held a low view of Scripture, this would not seem a burden. But it has been a tenet of the church that our understanding of God, ourselves, our history, our destiny, and everything needed to live out our faith is found in the Bible.⁴¹

New interpretations of the Bible require concomitant theological novelty. Aside from the obvious dismissal of the doctrine of creation, other tenets are now targets for questions. Original sin and the effects of the Fall must clearly be understood in a new way, as must the origin of death, sickness, and suffering.⁴² The symmetry between the Fall and the restoration of God's creation at the end of time becomes unbalanced, as does the Flood as the forerunner of the universal Final Judgment. Non-traditional understandings of these doctrines impinge on many others, including the core doctrines of the work of Christ. If death

and suffering are not directly tied to the Fall, then how can the defeat of death be tied to Christ's sacrifice?

Old-earth paradigm and a weakened church and culture

Whenever the church has embraced naturalism, it has led to its weakening. The example of Western Europe is obvious—Europeans today are born into a secular, post-Christian civilization. We can trace the decline: Lyell's geology, Darwin's biology, Freud's psychology, and all the societal dysfunction that has followed.

Arguments against creationism typically reside in the dangers of a 'rejection of science'. Old earth proponents think this makes the church lose face in the eyes of our secular culture and that it damages our youth, who, when confronted by 'truth' in school, lose their faith. But the rejection-of-science meme loses its force in light of the struggle between competing worldviews. Second, science is a Christian innovation, and one developed during the heyday of orthodoxy.⁴³ This does not mean that every scientist is a Christian, but that the presuppositions of science are.⁴⁴ Also, the state of someone's salvation does not depend on their correct apprehension of science or any other human discipline, but upon the work of God within, regardless of erroneous views about Genesis.

This issue can be completely turned around by a simple question. How have those parts of the church that have embraced secular natural history fared in conquering the culture for Christ? In case after case (e.g. the demise of Princeton as a bastion of orthodoxy⁴⁵), the answer is clearly that the results have been disastrous. Almost all of the denominations that were the cultural foundations of the West in the 19th century have become almost irrelevant to today's society. From Europe to mainline America, the disintegration of churches tracks with their accommodation with naturalism.

But even this misses the point. In his first letter to the sophisticated Corinthians, Paul makes it clear that worldly intellectual respectability is neither a possible nor a desirable goal for the church. "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God" (1 Corinthians 3:19). Christian theology and intellectual endeavour does not exist to impress the world's savants; it exists to proclaim God's truth in a world that is expected to oppose it at every turn. The moral arguments of old-earth Christians fall short of both reality and the moral teaching of Scripture.

The 'Galileo' objection

A point constantly raised by Christian deep time advocates is the 'example' of Galileo and the geocentrism controversy.⁴⁶⁻⁴⁸ For many centuries, the church accepted the Ptolemaic cosmology, finding support in various

passages (e.g. Joshua 10:12–13, Psalm 93:1, and Ecclesiastes 1:5). Copernican astronomy (as developed by Galileo, Kepler, and Newton) confirmed Ptolemy had erred; earth was not stationary at the physical centre of the universe. The church was forced to reinterpret the ‘geocentric passages’ of Scripture, setting a precedent that ‘science’ could interpret Scripture. Today, old-earth proponents argue that deep time is good science, like geokineticism, and that the church must likewise reinterpret Scripture to accommodate it.^{49,50} But does this comparison hold up under scrutiny?

A number of Christians have finally realized the propagandistic nature of this argument and its accompanying distortions.^{51,52} It fails because its two key assumptions—(1) science *determined* the church’s geocentric reading of Scripture, and (2) secular geohistory and geokinetic astronomy are analogous and are ‘good science’—are wrong.

Although observational science drove the church to reinterpret the ‘geocentric’ passages, geokineticism did not force a new exegesis. Instead, it forced theologians to see *if* they had initially understood the author’s intent. They had not. The ‘geocentric’ texts are: (1) poetic literature where the imagery of a stationary earth is clearly symbolic for something else (e.g. Psalm 93:1), or (2) describing an earth-bound reference frame *without* discussing cosmology (e.g. Joshua 10:12–13 and Ecclesiastes 1:5). In none of these passages were the authors teaching a cosmology. These readings of the various ‘geocentric’ passages are true *independent* of geokineticism. As Sarfati points out: “The misunderstanding arose because people failed to realize that biblical passages must be understood in terms of what the *author was trying to convey*.”⁵³

Second, deep time geology is not analogous to geokineticism, is not ‘good science’, and in many ways is not science at all. Unlike the arrangement of the solar system, in which the relevant bodies can be *directly* and *repeatably* observed and measured, deep time is a worldview-driven assumption about the *unobservable* and *unrepeatable* past. Copernican cosmology was a question of *observational perspective*; geocentrists made the mistake of assuming earth was an *absolute physical* reference frame. But there is no such thing. There are many valid observational reference frames—even geocentric—but none are absolute. All the Bible requires is that earth is a *valid observational* reference frame.

Furthermore, the Galileo affair has been used as a secular propaganda tool for several centuries. Distortions from that bias are common and significant. Our standard for understanding the truth and meaning of those historical events is pushed higher by that known bias. If we know distortion exists, how deep does it run and how might it

affect important sources? In summary, the whole affair is a red herring designed to distract from the dramatic differences between secular natural history and the Bible. Affirming deep time amounts to saying the church for 1,800 years fundamentally misunderstood the historical referentiality of the whole biblical story.

The necessary conflict between the two worldviews

While theologians may be excused for failing to understand the nature of secular natural history, they have no excuse for failing to see the historical conflict between Christ and the world. Ever since Cain and Abel, the Bible has presented history in terms of an unremitting struggle between good and evil. We see the drama between Moses and Pharaoh, Israel and Philistia, Mordecai and Haman, and Jesus and his opponents. The Apostles made it perfectly clear that this conflict carried over to the church, their teaching gruesomely reinforced by terrible persecution. Historical examples from every age could be multiplied.

This struggle is taught in 1 Corinthians 1, where the power and wisdom of the gospel are manifested to an unbelieving world as ‘foolishness’ or ‘a stumbling block’. Today, the biblical orthodoxy of creationists is likewise seen by the world as ‘foolishness’ and by the unbelieving religious community as ‘a stumbling block’. Theologians might argue that creationism is not the gospel. But the essence of creationism is the integrity of Genesis, which takes us to the integrity of Scripture as a whole. Furthermore, Genesis provides the context for the cross. The Incarnation is meaningless apart from mankind’s creation in God’s image, Adam and Eve’s rebellion and fall, and the sentence of death for that sin, all taught in Genesis 1–3 and illustrated in Genesis 6–8.

Compromise with secular ‘science’ for the sake of keeping the church from looking “foolish” in the world’s sight, or for the sake of preventing “a stumbling block” to unbelievers, is contrary to the spiritual struggle taught by Scripture, reinforced by experience, and the context for the current debate. Numerous biblical admonitions warn Christians to avoid conformity with the world. Furthermore, it avoids the fact that Satan is actively seeking the ruin of God’s church, both corporately and individually. We would go so far as to say that the unremitting vituperation of the world towards creationism is a powerful argument in its favour.

The real role of science within this necessary conflict

Secularists since the Enlightenment have used science as a sword against Christianity.⁵⁴ Old-earth Christians concede the point; some enthusiastically, some grudgingly.

But both groups miss the real significance of science in the debate over origins and earth history. They fail to see that the real role of science is as an apologetic tool *against* naturalism and the old-earth paradigm.

Science is the child of Christianity, birthed in medieval universities and brought to full flower in the Bible-centred world of the Reformation.^{9,17} As such, its most fundamental axioms were derived from Christian theology, particularly the doctrine of creation.⁵⁵ Enlightenment secularists were clever, but were blind to their own immersion in the Christian worldview, and so failed to see the Christian views that permeated their thinking.⁵⁶ They stole science and turned it against its parent worldview. But, in doing so, they failed to replace its Christian foundation with a secular one. So when they attack Christianity using science, they are, in fact, using Christianity to attack Christianity in the name of naturalism. This disconnect between the justifying axioms of science and its misuse shows a marked contradiction, and that contradiction is a powerful challenge to naturalism, because it shows naturalism to be self-contradictory, and therefore self-refuting.⁵⁷ These inconsistencies have been documented.⁵⁸ If naturalism is logically incoherent, and if it is the natural home of the old-earth paradigm, then the paradigm itself is highly suspect.

If Christians examined these consistencies between science and Christianity and concomitant inconsistencies between science and naturalism, it would seriously undermine secular natural history. The secret is to not look at the differences between the worldviews, but at their similarities.⁵⁴ Any argument from science against the traditional young-earth view partakes of these contradictions. This may be one reason why old-earth Christians are confused. They see the inherent consistency between science and their worldview, but they fail to see the flip side of the argument as it applies to naturalism and its constructs.

For example, geologists presuppose uniformitarianism. It is present not only in explicit theories, but in multiple layers of assumptions built over many decades. Uniformitarianism is a doctrine with many problems,⁵⁹ inconsistent with Christianity. Old-earth Christians have mistaken it for an empirical conclusion, and so miss the point. Uniformitarianism rests on the Christian axiom of uniformity, which is supported by the unbroken line of cause and effect residing in the mind of God. Only God can justify uniformity; secular materialism cannot. Thus secular uniformitarianism is a barren doctrine, and old-earth arguments built on its assumption are equally invalid.

Thus, the common ground between naturalism and Christianity—science—is one of the greatest reasons

to reject naturalism in all of its aspects. If old-earth Christians were to understand the apologetic force of the relationship between science and naturalism, they would be forced by logic to either embrace the creationist position, abandon reason, or abandon their faith.

Conclusion

Belief in an old earth is a tenet of the worldview of naturalism. If the force of logic is not sufficient (and it should be), the lessons of history reinforce that conclusion. Belief in an old earth was a secular innovation of the Enlightenment, not a theological discovery. Its acceptance forces a cascade of heterodoxy, the effects of which have been detrimental to Christ's church over the past two centuries. Those parts of the body that have remained steadfastly orthodox have tended to flourish, while those that have rejected that orthodoxy are either dead or dying. But that is not the main point. God calls his church to be faithful in the face of opposition, not to embrace it. Rewards in the new creation will not be given for intellectual prowess, but for perseverance in the face of the world to those who are willing to accept the statement, "let God be found true, though every man be found a liar" (Romans 3:4).

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