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Theologizing Prehistory, Implications for Mission, Part I

Ralph D. Winter Tuesday, July 31, 2001

We talk casually today, almost blithely, about the Copernican Revolution, which was basically a massive and arresting readjustment of understanding about the nature of the universe. In a corner of Europe Copernicus proposed a major new understanding which staggeringly rearranged the position of known celestial objects, as though rearranging the furniture in one corner of a vast room such that those who were in that corner could see the larger room.

A second Copernican Revolution, if you will, took place when Hubble, here in Pasadena, employed the latest telescope, a few miles away up Mount Wilson, to explode the size of that already larger Copernican room by proposing that almost all those little lights out there in the sky were actually enormous galaxies of their own.

More recently, still more Copernican Revolutions have continued to take place as our cosmologists puzzle their way more deeply almost daily into increased complexities and unfathomed mysteries of an ever-larger phenomenon, those thousands of lights visible to the naked eye have become billions to the telescopes.

We are less likely to speak of the Keplerian Revolution, which, in developing the mathematical description of planetary motion, was basically an astounding leap forward in awareness of the orderliness of nature. No one had ever captured nature's laws in mathematical equations. Then, the revolutionary thinking embodied in the Newtonian breakthrough added details to Kepler's already orderly nature.

Standing upon Newton's additional insights godly men such as Faraday dramatically furthered our awareness not only of the very existence of "laws" of nature but of the astonishing ways in which a knowledge of those laws could be harnessed for human use. He was in one sense not only a scientist but an engineer, not only penetrating some of the still-today mysterious phenomena we call magnetism and electricity but coming up with—among many other things— both the electric motor and its reverse, the electric generator.

On the heels of these excitements and rearrangements of our thinking about nature a doorway then opened further into a new dimension of complexity, a largely unexpected world as new and as significant as Alice going through the looking glass, a tiny world totally invisible to the

naked eye. In many respects all of the earlier breakthroughs of additional human apprehension of nature have been almost totally eclipsed by the historically recent awareness of the seemingly unending complexities at the small end of the scale.

This new dimension of reality includes not only the imponderables of the atom and the inert realities of the inorganic molecules but the infinitely more complex phenomenon of life itself, DNA, viruses, bacteria, cells, parasites, which in comparison would reduce the San Diego Zoo to the simplicity of the point of a pin compared to the complexity of the entire planet.

This new dimension of reality has been every bit as Copernican in its demands for intellectual rearrangement. The somewhat simplistic Darwinian scheme of ever more complex forms of life forming automatically has been forced to give way to the awareness that neither largeness nor lateness in history necessarily coordinate with complexity. The housefly has eyes that are incredibly more elaborate than the human eye. Certain very small forms of life navigate by use of celestial data. Other tiny insects have a sense of smell that allows them to detect floating molecules a mile away. Even honey bees have navigation systems that are still puzzling. Human sensory apparatus is clumsy by comparison to such examples. Yet humans do things that even the most advanced primates could not possibly do. Managing the words on this page, let alone the thinking behind these words or the computer that generates these forms on my screen, is totally beyond any other form of life.

Amidst all this recent explosion of our understanding of both complexity and attendant confusion, we are in some ways much closer to an overall understanding of things. Indeed I do not believe it is too early to launch theories about the development of life forms which are undergirded with theology, if you understand theology to mean thinking that makes room for an awareness of intention and intelligence behind natural realities. One of the most fully explored realities in the past 50 years has been what is commonly referred to as the Record of the Rocks. Here we see life forms in a somewhat regular progression of size. Yet the size of dinosaurs does not correlate with intelligence, and neither does smallness coordinate with simplicity. Nevertheless the earliest evidences of life are in fact both smaller and simpler than later forms. For this apparent progression Darwin has his theory, around which much of the secular world has rallied. Christians do not have a similarly concrete consensus about how it all happened. Some continue to insist that it all happened in an instant, the rest unfolding like clockwork. I do not question that such an idea is a perfectly reasonable idea—that God could have created our planet in an instant replete with rock layers that would give the impression of gradual formation over immense lengths of time. The conviction that God could have done this, however, is not the same as assuming that this is the way God did it. Still other Evangelicals back away entirely from conjecturing any details at all about how it happened, they simply insist that God, not Darwin, did it.

At least we can recognize that among Evangelicals great strides have been seen lately in rallying around the evidence of intelligent design in nature. Yet, neither Michael Behe nor Philip Johnson were able to answer the question posed by a Canadian philosopher in one of the last TV debates sponsored by William Buckley when he asked “Does your God make parasites?” That is, evidences for evil design are not heard among Christians as yet, despite the very evident violence-drenched nature that is perfectly visible to a small child. (Here I am reminded of the many small children who, looking at a globe, have wondered out loud about the possibility—long before scientists would even consider the idea—that the east coast of South America used to fit into the west coast of Africa. Today children are treated to close-up views of animals in nature tearing other animals apart and no one suggests this is ungodly violence. Only when humans do that sort of thing does our theology speak up.

Suppose, now for a few minutes, for the sake of discussion, we ask what might it mean theologically if the so-called Record of the Rocks were taken at face value, along with regarding as true the fourteen current different methods of estimating age.

For one thing, the now enormous mass of information that has been gathered does at least indicate that forms of life that are destructive to other forms of life appeared late in the record. And, when that kind of evil appeared it appeared pervasively. At every level of life, from small forms to large, predatory forms suddenly appeared. Current thinking puts this curious event, an aspect of what is often referred to as the Cambrian Explosion, at about 550 million years ago. From that point until this moment, there is such constant and pervasive violence in nature that it is common to assume that this is the way it was intended to be, that this is simply “the way it is,” not going into any detail as to the when or the why.

All of this cries out for an explanation. Perhaps multiple trial explanations are possible. One that comes to my mind takes seriously the idea that there is a supreme, personal intelligence (whom we can call God), and that this person has created beings often called heavenly messengers (angels) but actually much more than simply messengers, intelligent workers, if you will. It is possible to think of such heavenly assistants as intelligent, able to learn and to please God, but apparently also being given true free will that has allowed a considerable number of them to be in revolt while at the same time not being confronted with old age.

This is all you really need, then, to conceive of such beings as working for God at the DNA level, many of them being able to tamper with the DNA molecule at least as skillfully as our contemporary scientists, whose enormous disadvantage, for one thing, is the size of human beings in comparison to the size of the nucleotides which make up the binary helix molecule which is the basic code for all of life forms.

The astonishing discovery that a mouse, an elephant, and a man, all have DNA that is roughly 95% the same gives us insight into the vast complexity of the constituent elements of cells and their amazing contents, and at the same time an understanding of why it took so long for these workers for God to learn to do more than arrive at the cellular level, apparently laboring four billion years or so before anything very much larger than single-cell life appeared possible. It is likely a measure of our limited and recent education about tiny things that allows us to wonder why it took so long for bigger forms of life to appear.

We can readily imagine a sequence something like this:

1. We don't really know much about the appearance of the universe itself. To believe that the whole universe suddenly exploded from a very tiny object requires more faith by far than any of the Christian claims about the miracles of Jesus. We do know that the phenomena to which we refer as “material” is consistent with that found on our planet and also outer space, and that somehow the laws of gravitation, light, magnetism, etc. are also continuous with what we know of outer space. This knowledge lasts us long enough to understand at least partially the reality and orderliness of the periodic table of elements—the fantastic array of larger and larger atoms that underlie all that we call material.
2. But apparently atoms and molecules of the kind which compose what is technically called “the inorganic universe” are the basis not only of all such forms of matter but are specifically the building blocks from which has been derived, somehow, that other far more unimaginable “organic universe.” Curiously all forms of life utilize the ubiquitous

carbon atom. Not all molecules built of carbon are “organic,” but all organic chemicals are built around carbon.

3. Only fairly recently in history have human beings discovered that all forms of life are apparently built up from and defined by an amazing coded molecule called DNA, a “double helix” involving millions and millions of atoms. Note that an additional intelligence is apparently required for a phenomenon which thus far seems to be unique to our planet, namely life forms. The DNA itself does not create life unless it is coded intelligently. It is like having on our hands a computer “language” like the widely familiar “BASIC.” All computer programs are built from what are called languages, but the language itself, like the English language, does not itself automatically create literature. It is a useful code to employ for that purpose but a grammar book does not create literature. Intelligence does.

The very tiniest life forms are enormously larger than the underlying DNA chain which defines their nature and function.

4. Thus, not only is the DNA molecule itself an incredibly complex reality, its endless potential for defining life is unimaginably more complex, and would seem to require even very intelligent angels a good long time to master.

5. In fact, a major milestone was achieved when the angels, no doubt following God’s blueprints, created the first cell, each one containing in its nucleus an essential coded DNA molecule, but also an enormous assortment of other activities highly integrated which if enlarged, each cell would resemble a large city in complexity.

6. Once the cell was achieved, then building larger life out of cells became a new challenge, one which could and did accelerate far more rapidly. After four and a half billion years, at roughly 550 million years ago, in the so-called Ediacaran era, we see forms of life that are radially symmetrical (like a starfish) and others that have bipolar symmetry, where you have a front and a back. What you do not see is any predatory forms of life. Nowhere are there are defensive measures like shells or spines or offensive devices like destructive teeth. Up to this point the angels were laboring to create new forms of life. They were learning from their task and from each other, and in different parts of the planet were producing different products, something like the state of Michigan has different kinds of automobiles emerging from different factories yet constantly aware of each other’s design trends.

7. But then, a major asteroidal collision wiped out a great deal of the life at that point, not the angels, not their knowledge and skills but their handiwork. Can angels get discouraged? It is not at all clear why but apparently they immediately went back to work and a lavish new array of life forms now appeared in what is called the Cambrian Explosion. Something totally new also appeared.

8. At precisely that moment a revolt must have occurred, which immediately pitted the loyal workers against rebels, launching a see-saw contest which would not only generate new forms of life but new forms of destructive life at every level. Rebel workers who had long known how to make DNA and proteins and so on could now both twist and distort existing forms of life so as to make them destructive of other forms of life. They also devised destructive retroviruses that could carry in a backpack, so to speak, replacement spans of DNA precisely designed to invade cells and distort the original DNA code in life

forms large and small. Thus, from the Cambrian period until now nature is a mad, wild, violent cauldron of killing and being killed, at every level.

Was this revolt due to discouragement on the part of some of the angels? We have no idea whatsoever how and why a leading supervisor and one-third of the angels defected. It is enough to deal with the what this time and not puzzle about the why.

What we have become accustomed to consider normal in nature, that is, both elaborate defenses and vicious offensive characteristics, can perhaps more realistically be seen more clearly as abnormal. Even the human immune system can be seen as something added for defense.

And, in view of the fact that the human immune system has been developed with sufficient sophistication to recognize over three thousand billion different invading bacteria (three trillion), again it is only our relative ignorance of all this that would lead us to wonder why it took angels so long a learning curve to be able to develop more complex animals.

Disease pathogens, whether viruses, bacteria, or parasites, display incredible intelligence either for good or evil. New pathogens and adjusted forms of existing pathogens are appearing constantly as well as heightened powers of our immune systems which are constantly being assailed by newly created menaces, which join the large number which have already learned how to invade our bodies without being destroyed.

But this is to get ahead of ourselves. The story following the Cambrian Explosion, estimated at 550 million years ago, followed both the routine continuation of the school of workers ever building larger and larger forms of life of all kinds, sea dwellers, land dwellers and air borne forms of life. More and more defense mechanisms were born. Thus, unique in the post Ediacaran era (that is, the Cambrian and following) has been the appearance of defensive shells, spines, poisons, protective scales, and fight-back capabilities. It seems every form of life had its particular predators. Many forms of life were driven to extinction. Today only one tenth of one percent of the various forms of life seen in the Record of the Rocks still exist. And, yes, the loyal angelic workers have not only put together new forms of life on schedule, but have been forced simultaneously to adapt them skillfully to defend themselves against opposing forms of life. These adaptations can most easily be understood as intelligent modifications not just accidental or fortuitous mutations.

In fact, if you reflect a moment on the 100-year story of the development of the automobile in the twentieth century, you must take into account the millions of large and small, but intelligent modifications during that period performed by thousands of keen designers and engineers, and performed by hundreds of thousands of workers. This amazing process, moving from the Model T Ford to the contemporary Lincoln Continental, produced today in the same place by the same company of workers, could be described as the "Evolution of the American Automobile," if we employ that disputed term evolution in this case as a guided, intelligent process.

In a parallel way loyal angelic workers may well have been busy across the years developing not only new forms of life but newly defensecapable forms in view of the relentless onslaught of life-destroying varieties which have been the labor and intelligence of the rebel workers.

More than once this gruesome contest got so bad that, perhaps it was timely for another asteroid from outer space to collide with the earth and destroy a great deal of both good and destructive forms of life.

Talk about asteroidal collisions is very recent, and, curiously, has gained great credence only because of the Moon landing which turned topsy turvy the long held idea that the Moon craters were volcanic when in fact they turned out to be impact craters. If the Moon had been splattered with collisions from outer space, then, the reasoning went, that the Earth must have suffered even more collisions, the difference being that in the case of the Moon the record has not been covered up by the active geological wear and tear of time and weather that is so well known on the Earth.

Thus, for example, it is now widely believed that dinosaurs disappeared as the result of a very large asteroid colliding with what we know today as the Yucatan peninsula in Mexico. Note in passing that our contemporary insanelly increasing exhaustion of fossil fuels is both allowed and limited distinctly by the creation of fossil fuels through sudden mass extinction—oil resulting from fossilized animal life, coal resulting from fossilized plant life.

Many studies of impact phenomena have been done since the Moon landing and its upsetting revelation about asteroidal activity. By now it is pretty well settled in scientific circles that the explosive impact of a large asteroid generates a global canopy of dust lasting for years, obscuring the sun and moon, and only gradually thinning so as to allow an awareness of dark and light periods caused by Earth's rotation with respect to the Sun. Finally, it can be understood that a collapse of the remaining canopy would allow suddenly the direct rays of Sun and Moon, and, of course, the possibility of a rainbow, which requires unobstructed rays of light to appear. This is a sequence, by the way, that is eerily reminiscent of the events early in the biblical book of Genesis.

At the same time, following a collision, the loyal workers would set about replacing forms of life extinguished in a collision. Indeed new and different designs would be possible. The sudden flourishing of new forms of life following major asteroidal collisions has always puzzled Darwinian thinkers, and clearly favors a theory of design over chance.

At some point, the Supreme Being may have decided to launch a new and more effective counterattack. This seems to have occurred immediately following a major collision. Now we are approaching what could be called the Edenic experiment, which in geologic time is very, very recent. For the first time an enormously significant and different kind of life was now formed. In many respects similar to earlier models, the homo sapiens would be much more capable of assisting the loyal workers in the necessary defense and counterattack against the destructive forces.

But even in this Edenic beachhead things went wrong, the arch rival succeeding in corrupting the divine design. The arch rival had "fallen" long before, at the onset of the Cambrian period. And during the next half billion years the existence of warring, antagonistic forms of life become the norm, all of that preceding Eden or the events of Genesis One. Genesis 1:1 in the Hebrew implies not creation out of nothing—the word BARA being the same word a potter uses in creating a pot—but rather the rehabilitation of a planet extensively damaged by an asteroid ("without form and void, darkness upon the deep").

Asteroidal collisions in Earth history have never killed all forms of life. At the time Eden was created there were no doubt many forms of life in existence outside of the garden, among which the characteristic constant, all-out war was continuing to take place.

The new experiment was a new great hope, but now homo sapiens also “fell” and slowed the reconquest of a plundered planet. Inside Eden as well as outside, counterforces to Creative Design thus now existed and took their toll. For many years, not only destructive external forces to homo sapiens existed but the distortion of man himself produced rampant aggression of man against man. The replenishing of the earth was drastically slowed by homicidal violence and pervasive disease pathogens. It is awesome that the most ancient evidences of homo sapiens display, characteristically, skulls crushed by human instrumentality, widespread cannibalism, as well as corruption by disease. Only recently and very reluctantly has this morbid evidence been recognized widely in scholarly circles.

As the result of the distortion of man himself, for many centuries human population grew only very slightly. For example, had our modern degree of conquest over disease and war been in force in Abraham’s day, human population of an estimated 28 million could have grown to 6 billion in only 123 years. Such explosive growth of population has been impossible until recently, most of the story being one of nearly total ignorance of the nature and mechanisms of disease.

Incidentally, the advent of homo sapiens brought literacy into the picture, and with literacy came documents which in turn have given rise to the study of history (often defined as the period during which writing was in existence), thus ending the Prehistory period. However, it is perfectly obvious that much of the story of life is in the prehistory period. (If the five billion year history of this planet were to be represented by a five-foot-long bar on a blackboard, the history period would only be the last 1/10 of the thickness of a piece of paper.) Thus, by the time homo sapiens appears, and writing appears, most of the story, in one sense, is over, or at least well established. Furthermore it is questionable whether the official “history” period can be well understood without the backdrop of prehistory.

For one thing, only prehistory records a period prior to the existence of warring life forms. Therefore, if all we do is to trace history we do not encounter the sudden appearance of violence, and thus we may very typically be blind to the existence of rampant evil and antagonism on a large scale. We may further be blind to the existence of an arch rival and, worst of all, we may thus impute to the Supreme Being blame for evil and suffering, which is exactly what many feel the Old Testament does.

Rather, however, than to blame God for the origin of evil or to blame the Bible for portraying Him in that light, it seems to me better to understand the Old Testament perspective as being an overall perspective, while the New Testament’s constant references to Satan are simply a more specific perspective. The best example is the dual reference to David’s numbering the people as found both in 2 Sam 24:1 (Where God “incites” David) and 1 Chr 24:1 (where Satan “incites” David).

Thus the story of prehistory continues essentially into the final moments of the story of life on earth. The main new factor is the existence of an incredibly more intelligent species, its “fall” and the unique corrective of the “Second Adam” further pressing the claims of God’s rule, His Kingdom right down to the present moment.

For us today is the challenge to understand the gigantic conflict which continues unabated, but which is rapidly being modified as both disease and war are relatively diminished, and as, we would hope, human awareness of Satanic opposition to and distortion of creation increases. Much of the history of medicine is the relatively blind but positive opposition to Satanic corruption, a pursuit of destructive pathogens which has enormously accelerated in the last few years. Modern gene-splicing illuminates the way the very nature of otherwise violent forms of life can be restored to peaceful coexistence. That is, against the backdrop of increasing insight into nature is the rather sudden and totally unexpected appearance of the complexity of the world of microbiology. I have already spoken of the need to theologize this new and enormous world of microbiology. The further task is to theologize the entire story of prehistory .

Theologizing Prehistory, Part II

Ralph D. Winter Missiology Hour, Tuesday, August 21, 2001

You might be interested in the main reason for my thinking about a Part II. One of our good friends, considering FMF membership, has a doctorate in missiology from the seminary in Portland where Rick Wood got his M.Div. and Tim Lewis got an M.A.. He was quite troubled by Part I, and there ensued a multi-cycled correspondence on the whole thing.

I will present some of his comments and my response to them:

RDW to Henry Harrison: Robby shared with me the following three sentences from you, and I am very grateful for your response. In fact, I prize highly anyone's comments. I cannot know what or how to say things if I have no idea what is puzzling or unacceptable.

<< Personally, I find a great deal to counter in Dr. Winter's July 31 paper on "Theologizing Prehistory." I find it extremely speculative and much of it ultimately impossible of proof one way or another. Further, it takes a particular theological position on the origin of man which I would hope (and, again, assume based on what you have said) is not an official position of FMF or affiliates. >>

You are correct, and I even said so in the paper itself—that this is all highly speculative. And I assure you it is not “official.” In fact, I introduced the paper to our group that day by saying they have never heard from me anything more speculative!

I am chiefly concerned that when we try to evangelize the 160,000 highly educated scientists in, say, the city of Hyderabad, India, for example, we must have at least a theologically sound "speculation" about WHAT THEY THINK THEY KNOW about the main events of earth history. To begin where they ARE is sound pedagogy, surely. It is now too late in history simply to match wits with the Swamis. India is highly industrialized, and the now millions of Western-educated Hindus go around with something like an intellectual dual personality. If we can't win this cutting edge kind of people we falter desperately in our sharing of the Gospel with the 600 million Hindus. In some ways they are the “gate keepers” of many less-well-educated members of the Hindu community. But we Evangelicals also have a tough time dealing with and digesting the world of science.

In the last 20 years the scientific world has racked up oodles and oodles of additional evidences from the "rocks" than they ever had before. They have more than 1,000 times more concrete evidence about the strange phase of earth's history in which the dinosaur type of life predominated, for example, which they regard as fairly recent, but almost totally eclipsed by an asteroidal collision (see the Princeton University Press book, *T. Rex and the Crater of Doom*, by Walter Alvarez).

Ever since the moon landing scientists have been scouring the earth for similar impact craters (despite enormous weathering here unlike the moon's surface) and have by now developed a widely held consensus concerning at least four "major extinction events," the latter of which, it seems to me, is the one which most likely preceeded the events described in Genesis One, and the first appearance of man, an event exceedingly recent by contrast even to the period of the dinosaurs.

Thus, my speculation about the origin of man fits in perfectly with the Young Earth view, and the Genesis record. What is it that you refer to when you speak of my "particular theological position on the origin of man?"

In regard to Satan, the Biblical record in Genesis does not state when he first broke away from God. Do you have any ideas (speculation) about when that happened? Obviously it happened before the events in Eden because he appears there full blown. It must have been earlier? How much earlier? I have speculated that, if we take the record of the rocks at face value, the most likely time would be (despite the fatal damage this does to the ridiculous Darwinian theory) when predatory forms of life in abundance suddenly appeared in the "record of the rocks," namely, at what is widely held in stupefied awe in Darwinian circles, the "Cambrian Explosion" of life forms, pegged at 550 million years ago. When would you put the fall of Satan?

Scientists in Hyderabad will likely have a Hindu predisposition to believe that all evil is of God (ominously similar to Augustine's Neo Platonism bequeathed to Aquinas, Calvin, and many contemporary pastors), and thus, will have no initial interest in the Christian understanding of Satan. However, I don't feel Evangelical theology says very much in detail about what Satan is doing either. But I have speculated that the hardest thing for the theistic position that we hold (in contrast to Hindu thought) is our ambiguous theological inheritance in regard to the origin of what I would call "deformed" life. To rehabilitate Satan, so to speak, and begin to put the blame on him for widespread distortion of God-created life forms, is to me the most satisfying (speculative) way to confront the pervasive violence and evil in nature, the existence of deadly bacteria, incredibly intelligent parasites, etc. I think this perspective (albeit speculative) can be electrifying to keen intellects with a Hindu background, because in that background lies at least dormant and unresolved the sweeping conviction that all life is sacred, and, of course, the resulting paradox is that so much of it is deadly, violent and life destroying.

Furthermore, our evangelism of Hindus is blunted and weakened seriously, it would seem, by our own unresolved inheritance in regard to evil. We find it difficult, yet logical, given Augustine's input, that the pastors of Massachusetts ganged up on Jonathan Edwards to condemn him for "interfering with Divine Providence" when he set out to protect his mission-field Indians from that very deadly pathogen, smallpox (eliminated between 1976 and 1986). We cannot and do not normally in our evangelism claim that God is NOT the author of smallpox, malaria, etc. We leave it to our hearers to suppose

that our God either does not know of the ravages of malaria, does not care, or does not have the ability to do anything to eliminate this kind of suffering and death. My speculation is that our Gospel would carry far greater conviction if we allied our God on the side of planned opposition to these deadly pathogens, rather than letting this be the exclusive domain of the new gods, "the scientists." I have speculated, as you can see, that these deadly pathogens are Satan's work, specifically the result of his dark angels' tinkering with DNA. Would our usual evangelism do well to contain that idea, clearly absolving our God from such blatant evil? Just speculation. What do you think?

Believe me, I truly am eager to have your further feedback. RDW >>

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Well, he responded and I continue with comments from him and to him:

Dear Henry, Thanks for your comments. I will touch on a few of your lines:

<< I was referring to the evident assumption in your paper that man was not simply created, directly by God, on the sixth literal day of creation. Your paper speculates on ages of genetic alterations, extinctions, etc. before the advent of man on what you called the "Edenic experiment." The theological position implied is that death on the earth did not come from the sin of man, but existed long before his sin. >>

I do indeed believe God directly created man on the sixth day. That is part of what I said was to underwrite. But, just like C.I. Scofield (on whose study Bible I grew up) I believe that a whole lot preceeded the events of Genesis One. And, I am aware that only by allowing secular people to go on thinking that the earth is five billion years old can I see how we can begin to insist to them that the creation of humans in fellowship with God, by contrast, is exceedingly recent and totally distinct from that past. And just as the "experiment" in which Noah was born was wiped out and God began all over again, so Genesis itself might well represent starting all over again. In fact, not only the most widely used study Bible, Scofield's, but almost all Evangelical scholars in his day and prior to that believed that the easiest way to account for "the record of the rocks" was to assume that all that happened before Genesis 1:2, and that Satan appeared in Eden with a vast crime record behind him.

Indeed, Henry Morris (whom I have known and respected since I was a teenager) and his ICR friends took a brand new tack, and launched a very different theory when they began writing as they did, essentially embracing the ideas of a recent creation as eloquently enunciated by Ellen White, founder and prophetess of the Seventh-Day Adventist tradition. In Morris and his associates her ideas have for many home schoolers triumphed over the accepted geology of the Scofield Bible which I was brought up on and which has long represented most Evangelicals other than Seventh-Day Adventists.

White's ideas through the ICR have come into their own and captured many people today, including members of our fellowship, even some of my own daughters. And for one good reason: they seem to uphold the Bible more effectively. In any case I have no interest whatsoever in twisting their arms or shaming them in any way. This is simply the now-huge and very respectable home school movement's point of view. But in Evangelical scientific circles, professors in Christian colleges, etc. the highly Evangelical American Scientific Affiliation (with its 7,000 members) the ICR position is in the

distinct minority. Hugh Ross (Reasons to Believe) alone is no doubt more widely accepted than ICR apart from homeschooling parents.

One point here: the destructive effect of Adam's sin is not denied by postulating that there had already been destructive effects deriving from Satans earlier fall.

Another of your paragraphs:

<<Regarding the "record in the rocks," it is much more easily explained by a cataclysmic flood, which is amply recorded in Scripture, than by supposed asteroid events which are not recorded. Flood geology can account for the mass of fossils, creation of oil deposits, etc. very well (again I would refer to the work of ICR).>>

Yes, this is Ellen White's idea all right. I would prefer to remain in a mode of speculation when it comes to such things. How well are you acquainted with the American Scientific Affiliation? As you know, I am not unwilling to speculate in ways that diverge from "accepted thought." But that is only when I become aware of something which could readily explain how "accepted thought" went wrong. In this case, do you know of anything that would steer virtually the entire ASA in the wrong direction? I am not a student of either position. I simply don't know how I could easily be convinced against a large, strong, well-balanced group of such Evangelical scholars.

Another paragraph:

<<To what extent Satan was involved in the perversion of the original goodness of creation is worthy of speculation within the simple reading of Genesis, but would have all happened after the sin of Adam and Eve, when God cursed the ground and man's body began to corrupt. If there had been no sin there would be nothing in all of creation that was not good (as it will be in Heaven).>>

All my life I have assumed that Adam's was the first sin. I never stopped to think that Satan already existed before Adam, and that Satan's enormous rebellion would quite naturally explain pervasive destruction and distortion and predation in that long period Scofield (and many others) have always talked about prior to Adam. I don't think this belittles the tragic results of Adam's sin. It is simply a larger context.

One more:

<<But I don't know anybody today who would agree with the theology of the pastors of Massachusetts regarding smallpox.>>

How dearly I wish this were true. Literally hundreds of people have come by our door to pray for my wife. Not a single person has ever ventured any comment on the subject of God's obedient people having any responsibility to find out what causes cancer. Oh, they have almost all urged this or that dietary "defense." But "offensive" action against cancer? Nary a word, nor apparently a thought. Indeed some have said, and perhaps more have thought, that there must surely be some sin in her life that God would do such a thing to her. I don't discount that sinful ways brings much evil upon us. But, is not at least some evil the work of Satan? And, do we ever, in the Name of Christ, set out to "destroy the works of the devil"?

Our theological tradition since Augustine has stripped Satan of any obvious works to be destroyed. Since Augustine, we have been led to think that God is the one who brings all suffering and death. And of course this much is true: God works all things (even evil) for good. But, don't you see WHY those pastors did not lift a finger to help Edwards? They

thought he was fighting God. It is also true that as a missionary he could not miss the awful evil his forest Indians suffered, while they, as white men, back in their Boston pulpits were relatively immune to smallpox when compared to the Indians.

And don't you see why I suspect that no other Christian in the next 200 and some years lifted a finger to eradicate smallpox? And my chagrin that when it was finally eliminated the effort was not a God-honoring Christian initiative? And, is it not embarrassing that a fine Christian man whose theological training is no more than that of a Sunday School teacher (Jimmy Carter) is the only believer I know who visited the mission field and decided that "living with" disease when that disease can be exterminated is not the best we can do?

Finally:

<<You still have to explain the reason that Satan was there in the first place to bring about such evil. At the very least, God "allowed" evil. That is enough of an indictment against the biblical God for most who try to explain Him away.>>

Well, wow, I do indeed wish I could "explain the reason that Satan was there in the first place." But I guess this is something God has not been pleased to reveal. You are quite right that this is a stumbling block for some people. But, it seems to me that to plead ignorant on this one point is far less a stumbling block than to plead ignorant in regard to the entire spectrum of rampant disease pathogens which are being perfected and adjusted minute by minute. Who is doing that? God? I don't believe for a split second that it is a Darwinian process. Then who? Why? Isn't this a lot more to explain?

I hate to see Satan dodging all the blame. I recall a Readers Digest article about a father whose boy died of a strange cancer and the father launched a campaign to find out how to deal with that kind of cancer. In a fundraising marathon the father himself died as he crossed the finish line. The younger son, employing all-too-common theology, said to his mother, "God would not do two bad things to us in one year, would He?" This is our Christian inheritance which all too often casts only God in the play. Satan is nowhere to be seen, or blamed. All the turmoil and troubles of this world is somehow God's fault. My pastor, at the Lake Avenue Congregational Church here in Pasadena once said, "Satan's greatest achievement is to cover his tracks." He has covered them well, it seems.

The introduction to Yancey's second edition of *Where is God When It Hurts* observes that books written centuries ago about suffering tend to give good reasons why God is doing this. They defend God. Modern books on suffering tend to blame God, to accuse Him of indifference or impotence. Neither view takes into account Satan. That's exactly the way Satan likes it!

Enough for now. Cordially, RDW

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Let me now add a comment that is beyond a response to a letter.

One of the specific points of disturbance is my willingness to speculate about the possibility of simultaneously holding both a Young Earth and an Old Earth point of view. Henry believes that his Young-Earth-only view is "rapidly growing in acceptance." He is right about that if you confine your attention to the homeschooling materials now available. My impression is, incidentally, that he is desperately wrong if you look at the wider Evangelical movement. But the issue of how many people believe what is true is

not all important. Rather, take the specific point of one of our staff, “The reiteration and amplification of this theme is reinforcing a larger impression that you are absorbed with personal interests and aren't adequately ‘receptor-oriented’.” Well, in fact, it is precisely my awareness of one very straightforward and open “receptor,” Henry, that I am thinking that our disturbed friend speaks for others on our staff who have had little larger perspective in this all important area, which not only impinges on the credibility of the Bible in our international outreach but on my own credibility regarding my belief in the authority and meaning of the Bible.

On the other hand, if anyone feels this is just too irrelevant, and too touchy an issue to touch, as well as being merely old-hat stuff or personal interest stuff, I would be glad to know that. I might add that one of my granddaughters, going off to Wheaton, is going to be bumping head-on into the unfortunate polarization between those Evangelicals who believe the earth (indeed the universe) is only 10,000 years old, and those who believe that a good deal of time has passed since the earth was formed. In fact, in a few days our brand new Global Year program will be dealing with several others of my own grandchildren on this very subject. Why do most Evangelical young people lose their faith in college, even Christian colleges? In part because of massive undiscussed discrepancies between what they have been taught to believe and the world views of the science of our time. As long as we keep these issues under wraps and banish discussion of them in our polite circles we will continue to find ourselves being considered bizarre and incredible by most of the people we wish to influence in the world around us. One of the simplest aims I could have in this forum might be to distinguish very clearly between 1) the Darwinian proposal that forms of life have become more complex across time due to accidental developments, that is, due to an accidental and unguided, unintelligent evolution, and 2) the related but totally different belief that literally dominates all the intellectual circles in the world, namely, that there is such a thing as ancient periods of time for this planet, displaying an amazing spectrum of no-longer existing forms of life, about 1,000 times more than now exist. In our desperation to reject the Darwinian hypothesis which claims no need for an intelligent designer, I fear many of our home-schooled young people (and Portland doctorates) have felt it necessary to deny the antiquity of the earth. Thus, when the Kansas Board of Education suggests teaching something in addition to Darwin, the whole world thinks that the only alternative is the highly visible, and by now somewhat notorious view of the so-called Creationists, which means not believing in the antiquity of the earth! This is like saying that if we feel we must reject the idea (and of course we do) that American automobiles evolved from Model T Fords to Lincoln Continentals in the past 100 years as the result of a wholly unguided and unaided process, the only alternative is to postulate that all of the models and makes of cars in the 20th century were made at the same time, buried in museums to give the impression that they were created over a long period of time, and that there was no evolution of design throughout a century. One view postulates no intelligent assistance in evolution of the automobile, and is of course absurd. The other view postulates that the only way the variety of cars could have happened is that a supreme intelligence made them all at once, in six days of time, a position which is equally difficult to defend even if perfectly possible theoretically. Yet, it is simply not the way our remembered experience and library archives would tell the story.

Thus we find ourselves insisting on an absurdity equal to the Darwinian absurdity. Why do we want to do that? But, even more ominous in the midst of this whole confusion is the fact that by denying the evidence for an old earth we put Satan out of work during the entire expanse of earth's history. We weave a picture that has Satan appearing in the Garden without any known crime record, as if he himself had fallen only a few days earlier and his first evil and corrupting deed was about to happen as he sets out to tempt Adam and Eve. Thus, we blind ourselves to what may be a massive, pervasive and lengthy record of diabolic corruption of the ruler of this earth. By doing so we essentially wander unarmed, undefended among secular scholars, like lambs to the slaughter, unaware of the very nature of our dangerous innocence, unable to mount an aggressive counterforce even to so blatant and monstrous an evil as heart disease, the number one killer in America today, which in just the past few months took our friends Dave Geisler, Jeff Brom, Woody Philips, without a single voice raised out of concern to find the real cause. Meanwhile we are lulled into inaction by the perfectly enormous outlay of time and energy we routinely spend in by-pass surgery, angioplasty, and even in concocting artificial hearts, or worst of all killing imprisoned people in China in order to transplant their hearts into diseased Taiwanese bodies, etc. Can you imagine anything more grotesque? Shall there be no voice raised against our ongoing ignoring of the fact that twenty percent of all heart disease occurs in the total absence of the currently proposed causal factors?

What I am trying to do, groping into it gradually but as fast as I can, is to try to undo a huge and diabolical complex of misunderstandings which enervates and destroys any resistance we might offer to the distorting works of the Devil.

To me the importance and urgency of this endeavor is therefore to some extent directly proportional to the degree of indifference or resistance to it. That is, the more likely our staff includes some who are victims of this diabolical complex, the more reason I feel we have to rush to their assistance, to at least expose them to another view. You might even predict that any true frontier may be a frontier precisely because it is unknown and hard to conceptualize. This does not mean that everything mysterious is a frontier but that in the case of every true frontier there may likely be a debilitating degree of mystery and misunderstanding that complicates our attention to it.

Talk about misunderstanding. If history consists of that period during which human beings wrote things down (which is one definition of history), and if, for discussion's sake, we accept 10,000 years as the length of that historical period, then, assuming a commonly accepted antiquity of the earth (which is five billion), the period of earth's "prehistory" is then inevitably defined as a period of God's creative activity that is 500,000 times longer than the historical period. You get this 500,000 number if you divide 5 billion years by 10,000 years.

However, even if you focus on prehistory as only the last 500 million years—the last tenth of that period—during which predatory forms of life have been in evidence (and during which conceivably a rebellious Satan began to do his deadly work), prehistory is still 50,000 times as long a period as the historical period. One more comparison: Let's consider the roughly 5 million years during which the so-called "hominids" appear (these are described as "humanity's primitive predecessors." During this 5 million-year period 15 different species grouped in 5 distinct "genuses" appear scattered over a period that is 25 times as long as the homo sapiens period. But note that even the 25-timeslonger period

of 5 million years is only one thousandth of the 5 billion year earth history, while the homo sapiens period is 1/25th of that one thousandth, and the 10,000 year period of recorded history is 1/20th of 1/25th of 1,1000th of the whole period. That is, history strictly defined is 1/500,000 of the whole.

In this light must we not speculate about that longer, “prehistory” period rather than confine ourselves to events in the 1/500,000th or the 1/50,000th of God's earthly activity? And do so even if that longer period displays to us 50,000 times as much evidence about Satan's works? And even if our Christian leaders around the world are being cut down daily by virtually unassailed but invasive and deadly efforts of “the god of this world,” and our outreach to non-Christians is made ineffective and substantially incomplete by our own widespread confusion about the pervasive presence of evil everywhere in nature?

I hope my motives are obvious. It must be clear that I suspect that our conventional but long-standing Evangelical reading of the Bible is confused crucially by the weak assumption that the only fountain or origin of evil is the result of Adam's sin, and that Satan in the garden had no past record of wrong. Not only that but I suspect that if you ask the ordinary Evangelical what precisely did Adam's sin do by way of corrupting creation you will commonly find on your hands an essentially speechless individual, an individual coasting along in life with hardly a clue as to what the real dangers are, and tending to assume God is behind the perfectly enormous and pervasive suffering in the world.

I ask you, is such a person well prepared to encompass the earth telling of the glory of God? Are we content to continue presenting a god who is apparently quite content if not happy about all this suffering, including that of my wife? A god who has no plans to conquer suffering in this life? A god who is not asking our collaboration? Do we do well simply to bend our efforts to multiply this kind of extensively blind and limited proclamation? Isn't this issue a mission frontier?

Now, I ask finally, does it matter if this issue has arisen to my attention in part because of a personal concern, which it obviously is? I see no reason to hide or suppress the fact that as I often am occupied rubbing my wife's back, which is now nearly in constantly pain (She died October 28, 2001), I do in fact wonder why God would allow this, and what might believers have done to head off this kind of cruelty and suffering. After all, necessity is the mother of invention, and many important discoveries have arisen from some one person's very personal crusade. Does an insight somehow lose relevance, or credibility or significance if it is unearthed by a concerned individual whose pursuit is fueled by personal interest? Is it not possible that my extrapolations on this issue are something brought into the kingdom for such a time as this?

RDW