

Letters

parison" (p. 30). The perplexing dilemma for educators, of course, is how to deal with fundamentalists, both religious and secular, in a pluralistic university environment. Drawing on Stephen Carter's three books (*The Culture of Disbelief*, *Civility*, and *God's Name in Vain*) he discusses his own successes and failures in addressing this problem.

Toward the end of the book, Nash discusses what he calls "the Six Principles of Moral Conversation." Based on the poem "The Man with the Hoe" by Edwin Markham (1899), which concludes: "We drew a circle that took him in," these are: (1) Belief declarations are not the same as conversations about beliefs; (2) All views deserve initial respect; (3) Find the truth in what you oppose, always focusing on achieving agreements on word meanings; (4) "All or nothing" thinking is destructive; (5) Reality exists. But all we know are stories about it; and (6) Moral conversation in itself "leans to the left, therefore allow for this." This book is highly recommended.

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Letters

On Universal Language

I would like to raise a few questions about Carol Hill's biblical evidence for a local versus universal flood (*Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* [September 2002]: 170-83). The thesis and conclusion of this article is that "all of the evidence, both biblical and scientific, leads to the conclusion that the Noachian deluge was a local, rather than a universal, flood." What caught my attention in this statement is the universal "all." It is certain that Hill has not examined all of the scientific evidence, but I will leave that for others to discuss. My intent here is only to point out some internal inconsistencies in Hill's biblical arguments.

The first biblical argument for a local flood is based mainly on interpretation of the universal language in the biblical account of the flood. Several biblical texts are cited to illustrate the use of universal language in contexts where a local application is probable. For example, universal language used to describe the famine in Gen 41:46, apparently does not mean the whole earth, so Hill concludes that the universal language in Gen 6-9 can likewise be interpreted as local. This conclusion may be correct, but it cannot be established from such comparisons. Why not compare the universal statements in Gen 6-8 to other examples where universal language is indeed universal. For example, the article refers to Col 1:6 where "world" (*cosmos*) seems to require a local interpretation, but perhaps the universal language in Gen 6-9 is more like the *cosmos* of John 3:16 and "all creation" in Col 1:15. What makes the examples Hill cites useful to her purpose is that the limited intent of the universal language is implied (though not always sure) from the immediate context in which it appears. One could make the opposite and equally weak argument by citing only the examples where the universal language taken in context has a universal

or global intent. So, Hill's comparisons establish nothing except that universal language in Scripture must be understood in context. Taken in its appropriate context, the universal language in Gen 6-9 and other biblical references to the flood (consider, for example, *cosmos* in Heb. 11:7) appears global.

The second of three of Hill's biblical arguments for a local flood is centered on a refutation of the canopy theory. Hill provides evidence and arguments which support the view that the mist of Gen 2:6 was an underground stream or spring rather than a canopy. Hill seems to agree with global flood proponents, at least on this one point, that the canopy theory, if correct, is evidence for a global flood. That may be, but it is not direct evidence for a global flood and the absence of the canopy is not evidence for a local flood. As Gen 7:11-12 implies, God apparently had lots of water (Gen 7:11); whether or not he got some of it from a canopy says nothing about the extent of the flood.

The third biblical argument cited in support of the local flood theory is, like the second, a refutation of a commonly held belief that is not directly relevant to the question. Hill's arguments to the effect that the ark did not land on Mount Ararat are substantive, but even if it could be proven that the final resting place of the ark was a much smaller hill, that would add little to an argument for or against a local flood. The only thing we can be sure of from the biblical account is that God directed the ark to a location which was safe for the people and animals to disembark.

So, taking stock (no pun intended) of "all the biblical evidence" cited in the article, we have three lines of argument, one which is fallacious and two which provide no substantive support for a local flood or against a global flood. But, there is more. Following Hill's principle that the biblical text can be "taken at face value," other questions arise from the plain reading of Gen 6-9.

If the flood was local, why spend 120 years building an ark; why not just chase the cows over the hill? Or why bother at all since most of the species already existed over the hill? Certainly most of the birds would be able to fly to higher ground; how humiliating for the eagles to be carried out of the valley in a house boat! What about the people that lived over the hill; are we to assume that everyone alive on the earth at the time of the flood lived in Mesopotamia; or, that none of the able bodied people in Mesopotamia were able to climb to higher ground? Were the survivors somehow not human as bearers of God's image, or was God a little confused when he made the statements in Gen 6:6-7? Then there is the problem of the rainbow; if the Noachian flood is local, then God's covenant with Noah and "all" flesh (Gen 9:12-17) must also refer to local floods and every subsequent destructive deluge stands in contradiction to God's Word (unless you assume that the covenant applies only to Mesopotamia which leads to the silly conclusion that Noah's descendants cannot benefit from the covenant unless they stay in Mesopotamia).

Hill also makes much of what the Bible does not say. For example, the article makes several statements similar to the following: "The Bible itself never claims that all of the sedimentary rock on earth formed at the time of the Noachian flood ..." This is true, but what the Bible does

not say about specific events is irrelevant to the question. The Bible also has nothing to say about unidentified flying objects (well okay, maybe Ezekiel's wheels have not yet been fully characterized). More important than the formation of sedimentary rock is Hill's assertion that the biblical account makes no reference to miracles associated with the flood. While acknowledging that God ordered the flood, Hill is anxious to minimize the miracles in the biblical account because she wants to use the lack of miracles as evidence for a local flood. For example, she emphasizes that "Noah did all that the Lord commanded him" (Gen 6:22) to make the point that Noah did not require a miracle from God to, among other things, collect all of the animals. In other words, Hill concludes that the flood must be local because the Bible does not specifically say that it took a miracle to collect the animals and a universal flood would have required Noah to collect more animals than is humanly possible. The difficulty, as Hill confirms, is that even a flood confined to the region of Mesopotamia would require collection and care of several hundred if not thousands of species. That would require, at the least, a divine course in zoology. Yes, Noah did what God commanded, but if we are to believe Gen 6-9 at all, we must accept that he did not do it without extraordinary means.

In my view, Hill's handling of both the science and the biblical evidence is influenced by uniformitarian assumptions about the physical evidence. The result is a "square peg-round hole" attempt to make Genesis conform to modern science. In any case, the principal thesis of Hill's paper is false. None of her biblical arguments provide direct support for the local flood theory.

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Response to Art Hill

I will attempt to address Art Hill's criticisms of my "The Noachian Flood: Universal or Local?" article in the September 2002 issue of *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* (pp. 170-83) in the order that they were given.

1. *Universal language.* The main reason for interpreting the language of Gen. 6-9 to be local rather than universal comes from the fact that the people of the Bible had a very limited world view. The ancient Mesopotamians had no idea of the Earth as a planet. Their "world" was the Mesopotamian alluvial plain and nearby surrounding areas. The term "the world," corresponding to the Greek word *kosmos* does not appear in the Bible until Matt. 4:8—it never appears in the Old Testament (the concept was not around yet), and when it does appear in the New Testament, it can be used either in a wide or narrow sense (*Strong's Concordance*). The word *kosmos* is never used in the Bible in a worldwide sense, because even in New Testament times, the Earth was not known to be a global planet. In other words, it does not matter that Art Hill quotes John 3:16, Col. 1:6, and Heb. 11:7 because the universality of the word, *as we have come to understand it today*, was not applicable in the first century AD, any more than it was in the third millennium BC. It was only gradually,

over time, that the sense of the word was expanded to include the entire planet Earth and all of its people groups.

2. *Context.* Referring back to Genesis and the "universal language" used therein, it thus seems logical from the above discussion to assume that this type of "biblical language" should be understood *in the context of that time and place and world view*—that is, in the context of the third millennium B.C., in Mesopotamia, and the limited (and local) world view of the Mesopotamians.

3. *Canopy theory.* In no way did I mean to imply that the canopy theory is correct or that it might be evidence for a global flood. The canopy theory is a purely human theological construction that tries to account for a universal flood—the original assumption. The idea of a canopy "mist" (Gen. 2:6) comes from a mistranslation of the Hebrew text, as pointed out by Hebrew scholar Cassuto and others.

4. *A much smaller hill.* The point of the Jabel Judi discussion was not the size of this hill (actually the main construct is a mountain), but its *location*. Jabel Judi lies within the Mesopotamian hydrologic basin, a necessary condition if the flood was really local rather than universal. Only in a restricted, very flat, hydrologic basin (such as the Mesopotamian basin), could the ark have traveled upstream, against the current, to reach the Ararat (Urartu) area. (Hopefully, the topic of the hydrology of Noah's Flood will be covered in a three-part series in *PSCF* sometime in the future.)

5. *One hundred twenty years building the ark.* The ancient Mesopotamians had two numbering systems—one sacred (numerological) and one secular (numerical). Numbers like 600 (60 x 10) (Noah's age) and 120 (60 x 2) were part of their sexagesimal (60-based) numerological system and are not to be taken literally, but symbolically, like the ages of the patriarchs. (I have a *PSCF* manuscript in review now entitled "Making Sense of the Numbers of Genesis" that discusses this topic.)

6. *People-animals outside of Mesopotamia.* This is a very good question, but unfortunately its answer is beyond the scope of this short reply. It encompasses a very controversial subject that involves Adam as the first human, the meaning of original sin, etc. It is my opinion that "all the people" who perished in the Flood resided in the Mesopotamian basin at ~2900 BC and were "sinfully" descended from Adam and thus under God's judgment. (I would advise reading John McIntyre's "The Historical Adam" in the same September 2002 issue for some of the theological aspects of this topic.)

7. *Rainbow.* The best answer that I know of to this question was given by Hugh Ross in *The Genesis Question* (Navpress [1998], 72-3): "The Bible makes no claim that the rainbow God showed Noah in Genesis 9 and the rain that caused it had never before been seen on Earth ... The rainbow was established by God as a sign or symbol of a covenant ... God chose something familiar, something previously existing ... the rainbow fits a pattern of something old and familiar being adopted as a sign of something new." It was a local flood, but the *meaning* of the rainbow became universal through God's covenant and intent.

8. *Sedimentary rock ... what the Bible does not say.* If what the Bible does not say is “irrelevant to the question,” then you must be of the opinion that most of the tenants of Young Earth Creationism are irrelevant. The Bible says nothing about a vapor canopy, about continents rapidly drifting apart, about sedimentary rock being formed at the time of Noah’s Flood, etc. This was exactly the point of my article in the March 2000 issue of *PSCF* on the “Garden of Eden: A Modern Landscape”: you cannot base a theology on what the Bible does not say, only on what it does say. The Bible does not claim that all of the sedimentary rock was formed in Noah’s flood (in fact, it implies the opposite), so neither should we.

9. *Miracles.* The same logic applies to miracles: we should not assume miracles that the Bible does not claim. God told Noah to round up the animals—the Bible says nothing about a miracle being involved in this particular activity. This does not mean that I do not believe in miracles or that miracles were not involved in the case of Noah’s Flood. However, if the Bible is to be taken at “face value,” then the miracles that it actually claims should be considered to be miracles, but those it does not claim should not be manufactured. In the case of Noah’s Flood, the Bible claims these miracles:

- a. It was God (*I, even I*; Gen. 6:17) who purposely brought the flood of water upon the Earth; i.e., God exercised absolute control over the forces of nature by causing the Flood. This was a miracle because God *intervened* into his physical laws for his own purposes.
- b. It was the Lord God who shut up Noah and his family into the ark (Gen. 7:17).
- c. It was God who restrained the floodwaters (Gen. 8:1–3) and brought the ark safely to the mountains of Ararat (Gen. 8:4).
- d. It was God who established a covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:18) and who made the rainbow a sign of that covenant (Gen. 9:13).

10. *Uniformitarian assumptions.* This sounds like Young Earth Creationist rhetoric. What does it have to do with the discussion? If, by this, you mean that I take an “Old-Earth Creationist” position, then you are correct. But it does not mean that I believe all things have remained uniform since the beginning of time. The Bible clearly indicates that God has intervened in his created world.

I thank Art Hill for his comments because such open discussion is crucial to maintaining a healthy Christian community. I invite other readers of *PSCF* (of whatever Christian persuasion) to submit their opinions on this topic.

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Discher Analysis Raises Concerns

The Discher-Van Till interaction raises two concerns in my mind. The first is moral. Christians generally regard themselves in some sense as God’s representatives in the world, and all would agree that God would not want any of us to believe that which is not true. Consider the following analogy. Fundamentalistic “date-setting” for the return of Christ has been almost completely abandoned by evangelicals. The reason, I suspect, is they understand that, regardless of the validity of the doctrine itself, the total failure of date-setting to this point has been counterproductive and destructive of the Christian message. “Gap-finding” is today’s upscale version of date-setting, and it is likewise obvious to all that, like date-setting, *all* previous gap-finding has resulted in the promotion as true of that which was not. Contemporary evangelicals have (for the most part) learned a lesson about date-setting. Perhaps it is time for the same to be said of gap-finding. All Christians, but particularly those in science, would do well to seriously consider the history of gap-finding and its impact on the message they are called upon to hold up before the world.

The second concern is methodological. Discher calls Van Till’s RFEP a “theory” that could be “confirmed empirically,” but which nevertheless “might not be correct.” I believe this analysis is seriously flawed. Discher has confused the choice of theories *within* a scientific world view (which is what Polyani’s meteorite example was about) with the choice of assumptions required to make *any* scientific understanding of the world possible. His claim that “empirical investigations” are somehow self-interpreting and require no background assumptions is very naive. Consider the oft-noticed refusal of current ID theorizers to take a position on the young-old earth controversy. Usually interpreted as politically motivated to avoid splitting the ID movement, this refusal in fact neatly avoids the necessity of revealing a commitment to naturalism, the only possible foundation on which a scientific choice can be made on the age issue (this is made admirably clear in Henry Morris’ writings). For centuries, it has been understood that empirical evidence tells us nothing without naturalistic assumptions. Philip Gosse, for example, considered the agreement with all empirical evidence to be a major argument in favor of his “apparent age” theory of a recent creation. This agreement was fully acknowledged by even Gosse’s most severe critics, and *every* proposed gap involves some version of such apparent age thinking (that is, involves a discontinuity between some physical state and the preceding state that cannot be bridged naturalistically). Much earlier, the single most important factor precipitating Galileo’s trial was his cavalier treatment of Urban VIII’s favorite argument: God could have created a world in which all the evidence indicates that the Earth moves but in which it, in fact, does not.

In my judgement, Discher’s analysis confuses rather than clarifies how gap thinking might relate to scientific attempts to understand the world from a Christian perspective.

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On Discher's Reply to Van Till

Mark Discher's reply, "Is Howard Van Till's Response to 'Van Till and Intelligent Design' a 'Right Stuff' Response?" (*PSCF* 54 [December 2002]: 240f), was very disappointing to me. His first point has three subpoints. He says that he referred to Van Till's published works. True, but his article footnotes more overheads from an oral presentation he did not hear than published sources.¹ Second, he says that Van Till did not do what he thought he should. This may be a relevant criticism to those who obfuscate to hide the truth, or to a judge instructing a witness to answer a question. It is patronizing here. Third, he simply declares: "I understand him just fine." This is equivalent to "I'm still right, and I've just told you how right I am."

The second point, that Van Till engages in a fallacy by generalizing from the past successes of science and the failures of nonscientific explanations, is not justified by the failures of philosophers (or scientists engaging in philosophy). Further, the unsuccessful and discouraged swain he mentions may well be judged objectively as continuing to fail so long as his approach and attitude remain the same. In any event, the immediate subjective response to disappointment cannot be elevated to a logical principle.

The third point, that Van Till is abetting the atheists, is irrelevant. Let me turn it around: Discher should not support a view to which followers of Moon, who claims to be the new Messiah of the Second Coming, adhere.² An honest appraisal recognizes that no one is responsible for those who may agree with them.

The fourth point, that one can detect design without knowing how it works, neglects the vital point that Van Till makes, that there is a difference between blue print and manufacture.³ He is clear that the universe was designed, so well designed that it worked properly from the moment of creation. What he wants is an explanation, if God did not do a complete job at creation, why the Almighty lacked competence to perfect the beginning and how the missing parts were later inserted.⁴ Indeed, one may press the matter further. One has a choice here between two empirical claims:

1. Since science has discovered so many mechanisms in the past, it will probably fill in most of the current gaps in our knowledge, which Van Till believes.
2. Science will *never* fill the gaps we recognize today, which springs from ID.

Does anyone who understands logic even a little want to demonstrate a "never"?

Fifth, the claim that all scientists engage in folk science is bogus. Folk science is not testing with a hope that a hypothesis is right, as Discher states, but an attempt to use science to justify a philosophical or theological assumption.⁵ Discher has blatantly altered the meaning to make it seem foolish. This is dishonest and unconscionable.

Rather than analyzing Discher's original paper,⁶ I have focused on his reply in order to more briefly present a critique of his approach. I find his response to Van Till grossly inadequate. The original paper, which received some criticism when it was presented orally, makes fewer errors. So, were I still teaching "Logic in Practice," I would

not use it as an example of sophistry. The two pages of the "Reply" could obviously be so used.

Notes

¹Howard J. Van Till, "Is the Creation a 'Right Stuff' Universe?" *PSCF* 54 (December 2002): 232. Nine footnotes in Mark Discher, "Van Till and Intelligent Design," *ibid.*, pp. 220-31, cite the overheads. Six refer to published material, one to an Internet site.

²Jonathon Wells, Senior Fellow, Discovery Institute, was ordained in the Unification Church of Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The teachings of the Unification Church are presented in www.rapidnet.cpm/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/moon/general.htm or, from the organization itself, in <http://members.tripod.com/~jho2/>.

³Van Till, "Is the Creation a 'Right Stuff' Universe?" pp. 237f.

⁴Theological grounds allow the claim that vertebrate and human life were miraculously introduced (Gen. 1:21, 27), but do not support multiple interventions. We do not have the information for a definitive scientific assessment of these matters.

⁵Van Till, "Is the Creation a 'Right Stuff' Universe?" p. 235. Note the repeated specification of "worldview beliefs" and religious beliefs.

⁶Discher, "Van Till and Intelligent Design," *ibid.*, pp. 220-31.

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Intelligent Design and Right Stuff: Where is the Truth?

I do not have the credentials to allow me to enter into the discussion involving "Intelligent Design" and "Right stuff" featured in the December issue of *PSCF*, but I would like to express my thoughts. First of all, I find Discher's remarks very convincing, but nevertheless I find Van Till's position more nearly in accord with what the truth must be—more in accord with the position of John Polkinghorne who said that "Only God could make a world that makes itself."¹ This seems to me a more wonderful God than one who must tinker with creation now and then to bring about his designs. But I believe the truth is grander still.

Any discussion of creation must include "why creation," and it must address "evil." Gregory Boyd has done a marvelous job in speaking to these two aspects of creation.² He shows that because the Creator is Love, evil is essentially inevitable. He does not address how the fact of evil can be reconciled to God. The first chapter of Colossians states that all things are reconciled to God through Jesus. Because of the truth of Colossians 1, God will see as he did after finishing creation that "it has been good. Very good." A more narrow view of Jesus would have God say something like, "It could have been much better, if only my creatures would have listen to me."

What reconciled means is given to us in Scripture by example. During the time of rebuilding the temple, a place for one of the stones could not be found. It was thought to be useless—a mistake—and just "in the way" of furthering the project. However, it was eventually found that it was exactly what was needed for the all-important "corner stone" (Ps. 118:21-24). Jesus used that incident as an example of his reconciling work (Mark 12:10-11). Peter also referred to the stone rejected by the builders in his

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proclamation of Jesus (Acts 4:11), and in his instruction to believers (1 Peter 2:7).

The meaning of reconciliation is to make what is contrary to the purpose of the one in charge, constructive. So, when all things are reconciled to God they are all made constructive in terms of his purpose in creation. The "forming" of Israel is given as an example of reconciling in action (Isa. 43:1-2, for example). The years that Israel was in slavery formed them into a coherent people, and the evil of Egypt was used as the tool of formation—all was reconciled. The same principle is used in forming of God's people today (Gal. 4:19; James 1:2-4).

Now, it might be possible that the reconciling that encompasses all of creation is the missing design element needed to make biological evolution function creatively.³ If it is not the needed design element itself, then it might supply what is necessary for design to be realized.

Notes

- ¹John Polkinghorne, Lecture at Chestnut Hill on November 28, 2000, as reported in *The Newsletter of the ASA/CSCA* 43, no. 2 (MAR/APR 2001): 8.
- ²Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).
- ³John Bracht, "Natural Selection as an Algorithm: Why Darwinian Processes Lack the Information Necessary to Evolve Complex Life," *PSCF* 54, no. 4 (December 2002): 264-9.

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Shocking News on Genetically Modified Corn

This is just a short note to colleagues to whom I have expressed concern on the worldwide misinformation on genetically-modified (GM) foods. It was disturbing in early September to see news reports that Zimbabwe had turned down U.S. corn because it contained some GM kernels.

Even more shocking is the report in *Science* ([8 November 2002]: 1153-4), that Zambia has turned this food down because of its "scientists' advice." The report says that these science "experts" in Zambia conclude "that the U.S. corn should be refused on the 'precautionary principle' because studies of the health risks of GM foods 'are inconclusive.'" Our U.S. experts say that Zambia has disregarded "the scientific evidence" and some label the Zambian science as "pseudoscience." The news report states that 35,000 Zambians will die of starvation by March 2003 if outside food is not let in.

This is an amazing tragedy. The Zambians express fear about a "might be" hazard and disregard the real hazard of starvation. Some of us know well the breadth and pernicious depth of the so-called "precautionary principle" so ardently adopted and used (misused) by doctrinaire environmentalists. It is a shame and sin for scientists and the Church to be ignorant and unconcerned about what is going on in these African countries.

The unsound sophistries of the Greens in Europe and the WHO have been taught to neophyte "scientists" in Africa—and look at the results. It is as if somebody is saying, "Let them starve! At least that is natural, and generations of the future will be protected from an unnatural evil that just might possibly be there. This GM food thing is suspect because it comes from industry and the evil U.S."

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