

note 1 to calling the stories in Genesis *fiction* or *myth* applies only if one treats Genesis as just another theory about what might have happened, not as eyewitness accounts.

³Paul H. Seely, "The GISP2 Ice Core: Ultimate Proof that Noah's Flood Was Not Global," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 252–60. Although he argued convincingly against the idea that the Greenland ice sheet formed after the flood, Seely may have overstated his case against global flood theories in general and Aardsma's in particular, as explained in my letter, "Do Ice Cores Disprove Aardsma's Flood Theory?" *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76–7. See my first letter, "On the Hills of Concordism and Creation Science," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 278, for a brief introduction to Gerald E. Aardsma's flood theory, or visit www.biblicalchronologist.org to begin a detailed study of his scientific claims.

⁴Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76. Seely apparently prefers a private definition of the word *private*, since the interpretations he described as private have been well publicized and widely debated for years, and everybody is welcome to accept them. Whatever he meant, we should agree that every interpretation, whether public or private, implies faith in some expert, authority, or one's own ability to approach or recognize the truth. It is seldom a matter of discovering consensus.

⁵Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 76. Aardsma deserves full credit for his own theory, so the Godfrey name does not belong on it.

⁶Dick Fischer, "Young-Earth Creationism: A Literal Mistake," *PSCF* 55, no. 4 (2003): 227.

⁷Fischer and Seely apparently agree that those other flood stories are older, but even this idea loses credibility if Aardsma is correct in making a 1000-year correction in biblical chronology, also explained in my letter, "On the Hills," *PSCF* 55, no.4 (2003): 278.

⁸See Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, (San Diego, CA: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 195–7, for one example of a creationist discussion of the flood and volcanoes. Morris concluded, "This entire phenomenon merits much further research and analysis, but ... the simple statement of [Gen 7] verse 11 provides the basic information needed to explain the physical cause of the great Flood ..." (p. 197). Morris and Aardsma disagree dramatically on what they think the physical cause was, but each one believes his own theory is compatible with the Bible.

⁹Paul H. Seely, "Concordism's Illusion," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 75. We can agree that the historical accuracy of the Bible is not "provable from Scripture" alone, but agreement with secular history strengthens belief in it, and several passages suggest that God knows the tutorial value of true history (Gen. 9:12–17; Ex. 13:1–16, 20:11, 31:17; Deut. 6:20–25; Josh. 4:1–7; Ps. 111:4; Jer. 2:1–7; Mic. 6:3–5; Rev. 14:7).

¹⁰See the letter by Henry F. Blank, "On the Structure of Genesis," *PSCF* 56, no. 1 (2004): 74–5, for support of the idea that Genesis combines accounts originally "written by the patriarchs who were intimately concerned with the events related." See Morris, *The Genesis Record*, pp. 26–30, for a fuller discussion of the same point.

Thomas James Godfrey
707 Burruss Drive
Blacksburg, VA 24060
godfrey@verizon.net

Accommodationism's Illusion of Solving Biblical Problems

In his *PSCF* letter, "Concordism's Illusion That It Is Upholding the Historicity of Genesis 1–11,"¹ Paul Seely claims that God accommodated his revelation to ancient cultural concepts which contradict historical/scientific facts. He even claims that "Jesus showed that he believed Scripture is sometimes accommodated to ingrained cultural concepts which are not merely scientifically defective, but which are morally defective (Matt.19:8/Mark 10:5)."

Seely charges creation science with "rejecting the overwhelming consensus of the best-trained scientists in the relevant sciences and substituting in its place private interpretations of the scientific data." In this I fully agree with him. But then he parallels that with charging "concordism ... [with] rejecting the overwhelming consensus of the best-trained Old Testament scholars and substituting in its place private interpretations of the biblical data." Here he leaves objectivity behind.

He calls "concordists" those who try to understand the biblical texts in a way which concords with reality, respecting scientific facts and biblical texts as they stand, being hesitant to jump to conclusions of contradictions. Seely bases his unproven assumption of accommodation on his conviction that a biblical text allows for only one correct interpretation. He appeals to the authority of the majority (90% in his argument) of "commentaries on Genesis by qualified Old Testament biblical scholars." Science no longer appeals to authorities, but discusses problems explicitly, until there is unanimity.

One commentary Seely recommended is Alexander Rofé's *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch*.² Rofé's approach is typical of source criticism, dissecting the texts into many fragments and completely rewriting Israel's history. Early Genesis chapters are claimed to be late copies of Mesopotamian myths. But making myths—even theologically refined—out of apparently historical narrative does not solve problems of interpretation, but sidesteps them. Many Old Testament scholars disagree with this approach.

We know ancient Hebrew from virtually nothing but the biblical texts themselves. A Hebrew concordance allows an inspection of all known usages of a given expression in all available contexts. But with rare expressions, it may become difficult to be sure about a "correct" interpretation, no matter how many commentaries agree. We may have to remain undecided between several possible interpretations—and they may not even be mutually exclusive.

This openness is what characterizes the harmonizing approach—vilified as "concordism." In fact it "allows both the Bible and the scientific data to freely say what they say"—a praise Seely bestows on his accommodationism only. Are Rofé and other source critics, in the tradition of Wellhausen, Bultmann etc., really allowing the Bible to freely say what it says? Are they not often pressing the text into the Procrustean bed of their own preconceptions?

Seely's caricature of "concordism" incorrectly assumes that the Bible is made to "teach science," even "modern science." But the only claim that is in fact made is the feasibility of an interpretation compatible with reality—although a text may allow other interpretations, as well. Why should a theory of biblical inspiration not allow for the possibility of God gently directing his prophets' thinking to choose formulations he—not they—knew are compatible with reality? Even if this reality covers scientific facts unknown to the prophets, the resulting texts would not explicitly teach such unknowables—or any science at all. It is not claimed, either, that the Bible provides accurate history in the modern sense, since its indications are manifestly incomplete. Compatibility with reality is sufficient. I agree with Seely that God delegated the discovery of science and history to humankind.

God gave the Bible for all times and all cultures, and he may have had his reasons for preventing avoidable offenses for later readers. This expectation of harmony cannot be proved, but it seems significant that no unambiguous case of explicit incompatibility with known facts has been documented. Accommodationism leads to unnecessary or even destructive offenses, particularly if moral accommodation is included. There is sufficient unavoidable offense in the cross of Christ.

Notes

¹Paul H. Seely, *PSCF* 56 (March 2004): 75.

²A. Rofé, *Introduction to the Composition of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1999); personal communication by P.H. Seely. For my commentary on Rofé's book, see my post of 25 Nov 2002 on "The Pentateuch dissected and revised" to the ASA internet discussion group, archived under www.calvin.edu/cgi-bin/archive.

Peter Rüst
ASA Fellow
CH-3148 Lanzenhäusern
Switzerland
pruest@dplanet.ch

Would God "Play" This Way?

Robert Boomsma's article "Embryonic Stem Cells and a Reformed Christian World View" (*PSCF* 56, no. 1 [2004]: 38–48) is a helpful and insightful review of Christian arguments for hES research, but I respectfully disagree with his conclusions. Boomsma begins by discussing the creation and our God-ordained stewardship over it. He suggests that "humans are called to play God, to be his agents in developing the creation," as long as this is done "as God plays God." I would grant that biotechnology can be a part of our stewardship over creation, but there are clearly-defined scriptural limits.

A powerful and compelling counter-argument can be made by a proper understanding of the word "play" in this context. "Playing God" is usually used in a much stronger sense, where "play" means to act in a role or to play a part. Used in this way, "playing God" means "to act in a role as God," or even "to usurp God's place." This is clearly prohibited. After all, this is the sin to which the serpent tempted Adam: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil"¹ Here, "knowing good and evil" means having moral autonomy or making one's own decisions independent of God.² Such a way of playing God goes beyond stewardship to hubris, and is seen in attempts to manipulate the nature of human life itself. This defies God's own declaration of human persons as "very good."³

Boomsma too quickly rejects the conception view of human personhood traditionally held by the Christian church. He claims this "places too much emphasis on an individual's genetic composition." He adds that "A human person is more than his or her genetic code." I agree, but a person is *at least* that. The uniqueness of an individual begins at the moment of *syngamy*, the establishment of the diploid order. This happens during fertilization/conception. Boomsma correctly points out that fertilization is a process that extends over thirty hours. Yet the fast block to polyspermy that occurs at the union of sperm and ovum is a three-second process that "locks in" the genetic material so that syngamy will inevitably happen, making this a strong candidate for the moment of personhood.⁴

In moving away from fertilization/conception as a decisive moment, Boomsma discusses the idea of twinning, as a possible counter-example to the idea of human uniqueness from conception. He cites my analogy that if a clone were made from an adult cell, no one would doubt that a full individual existed prior to the creation of such a "twin." But he claims that this doesn't help, because it is not clear which individual is "continuously present before and after." Here, Boomsma confuses epistemic certainty with ontological reality: our knowledge of something does not change its nature. It is clear from the cloning analogy that one individual is present from conception and the other is present from the moment of the split. It does not matter if we know which one is which.

The larger issue here is the dualistic nature of human beings, that persons are both body and soul. On this view, there is both a physical side and a spiritual element that lives on after bodily death. Surely Christianity depends upon this metaphysical reality. A corollary to this view is that persons have continuity back to their earlier selves. This means that an embryo is the necessary substantial precursor to the adult individual, and that this continuity extends back to the moment of syngamy.⁵

Human beings begin at their biological beginnings, and there are no philosophically or theologically compelling reasons to reject their moral value at this point other than sheer utilitarianism. That is why Christians should not accept such a cold calculus, but should reject hES research. Jesus said that all men shall know us as His disciples if we love one another.⁶ Our fidelity to this principle will be demonstrated by the way we love the smallest and most defenseless in our midst.

If, as Boomsma suggests, "Humans are called to play God," then we must ask regarding hES research, "Would God play in this way?"

Notes

¹Genesis 3:5b.

²See, for example, V. P. Hamilton, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990).

³Genesis 1:31.

⁴For an extensive discussion of these ideas, see D. M. Sullivan, "The Conception View of Personhood: A Review." *Ethics and Medicine* 19, no. 1 (2003): 11–34.

⁵For an in-depth development of Christian substance dualism, see J. P. Moreland and S. B. Rae, *Body and Soul* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

⁶John 13:35

Dennis M. Sullivan
Professor of Biology
Cedarville University
Cedarville, Ohio 45314
SULLIVAN@cedarville.edu

Articles Lack Real Science and Faith

The articles in this journal are becoming more and more philosophical and theological, that is, they are removed from the realities of science and the Christian faith. Science is the study of the physical world from quantum physics to the cosmos. If we accept that God is the Creator, then we do not need philosophy to study science; we should actually study science as it is. It is God's second book.