

Article

Twenty-Five ASA Fellows and Editors Tell of PSCF Articles That Changed Their Lives

observable geologic processes, or otherwise by processes conforming to natural laws and conditions. Young Earth Creationism and flood geology presume unfamiliar catastrophic and often miraculous (unnatural) interventions.

The relatively short article provided both philosophical and historical contexts to the propositional concerns that mainstream geologists, including Christians like me, have with flood geology as promoted by its advocates. Using their examples, Young explained how flood geologists misunderstood the practical meaning and application of uniformitarianism in their rejection of mainstream geological interpretations and their catastrophist re-interpretations. He also responded to their theological proposition that uniformitarianism was, at its base, unbiblical. His historical review distinguished methodological uniformitarianism, as practiced by mainstream geologists, from substantive uniformitarianism, a variant that would presume no catastrophic processes in the formation of rocks or landscapes. Young states,

The fact of the matter is that flood catastrophists spend considerable effort in beating a dead horse, because it is highly questionable whether any significant number of geologists has held to anything like substantive uniformitarianism for a number of years. (p. 149)

Of historical note, the discovery of the global deposit of meteoric “dust” attributed to the mass extinction of the dinosaurs some 66 million years ago would be published in 1980. The Chicxulub Impact has become the posterchild for methodological uniformitarianism that embraces the possibility of natural catastrophe, even worldwide.

Finally, Young provides examples of how flood geology is full of uniformitarian applications, in its advocates’ interpretations of various geological features, such as fossil graveyards and submarine debris flow deposits (turbidities). And when all else fails, Young points out the biblical catastrophists’ regular appeal to miracle, in order to compress the geologic timescale from billions to thousands of years duration.

This article appears to be Davis Young’s first in *JASA*. His articles effectively advanced earlier journal contributions pertaining to the geosciences by Laurence Kulp (1950s), William Tanner (1960s), and Daniel

Wonderly (1970s). More recently, Keith Miller and Carol Hill are geologists who have written provocative *PSCF* articles that advance the geoscience-faith dialog yet further.

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1984

CONRAD HYERS, “Dinosaur Religion: On Interpreting and Misinterpreting the Creation Texts,” *JASA* 36, no. 3 (1984): 142–48, and CONRAD HYERS, “The Narrative Form of Genesis 1: Cosmogenic, Yes; Scientific, No,” *JASA* 36, no. 4 (1984): 208–15.

I still remember when the September 1984 issue of what was then called the *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* arrived in my mailbox. We had just moved to Nashville for my first academic job after defending my dissertation at Indiana University in August. My initial thought was, I’m glad the ASA got my address change processed in time for this issue. On the way back to our apartment, I glanced at the table of contents on the back cover and quickly noticed an article called “Dinosaur Religion: On Interpreting and Misinterpreting the Creation Texts,” by an author I did not recognize, Conrad Hyers. Oh well, I thought, an article attacking creationism. I was hoping for something different. Maybe I’ll read it, maybe I won’t.

I decided to read it—and I couldn’t put it down. It was all new to me, and it transformed my thinking right down to this day. Once I started teaching students at Messiah about science and the Bible a few years later, I assigned it in every course where it topically fit.

As it happens, I never met Hyers, a Presbyterian minister with a doctorate from Princeton Seminary who taught religion for many years at Gustavus Adolphus College. If I had, I would have told him how important his article was to me and my students—many of whom responded to it just as I did: these ideas are really important. Why haven’t I heard this before? Although he did not use terminology associated with the “Framework View” of Genesis, that is basically what he believed (a second article of his published in the next issue nails this down). What

struck me most, was his emphasis on what Genesis is really about:

... a radical and sweeping affirmation of monotheism vis-a-vis polytheism, syncretism and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principal categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but creatures—creations of the one true God who is the only one, without a second or third. Each day dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in a cosmological and symmetrical order. (p. 147)

To borrow words from St. Luke, scales fell from my eyes. Suddenly I understood that all the commotion about the day-age theory, the gap theory, and recent creation in six literal days was just so much noise. None of that had anything to do with what God was telling us here.

I still don't know why I hadn't heard that before. Bernard Ramm, whose seminal book, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (1954), had hitherto been the single most important guide to my thinking about origins, had advocated the "pictorial-day interpretation," a type of "moderate concordism" in which "geology and Genesis tell in broad outline the same story." That's about as close as I could remember to Hyers's view. It's not all that close. For Hyers, Genesis does not even attempt to tell anything remotely like a scientific story: it's about religion, not science.

In nearly forty years since that moment of discovery, I've learned that historical and literary context are crucially important for understanding any text, especially a biblical text. Hyers placed Genesis fully within the worldview of the Ancient Near East. God told the Hebrews exactly what they needed to hear, embedding the crucial message of monotheism in a type of literature they already understood, tweaking elements of existing creation stories to proclaim a profound message that denied the common claims of all those other stories: nothing you see is divine, not even the Sun, the Moon, or the stars overhead. I made them all. Worship me, not them.

What about "dinosaur religion," the words that first got my attention? Here's how Hyers used that term: "When certain scientists suggest that the religious accounts of creation are now outmoded and superceded by modern scientific accounts of things, this is 'dinosaur religion'" (p. 143). He wrote this

before Richard Dawkins became the devil's chaplain, before Stephen Hawking was world famous, and before people started talking about the "New Atheism." Once again, Hyers was spot on target. If dinosaurs evolved into birds, they are in some sense still around. Dinosaur religion certainly is. My debt to Conrad Hyers is ongoing.

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1985

COLIN J. HUMPHREYS and W. GRAEME WADDINGTON, "The Date of the Crucifixion," *JASA* 37, no. 1 (1985): 2-10.

One of the more delightful papers that I encountered in *PSCF*—and one that I still recall from time to time—was a paper by Colin Humphreys and Graeme Waddington on dating the crucifixion of Christ.

This interesting paper made use of celestial mechanics, in conjunction with biblical texts and with what is known as reliable history, to propose that Jesus's crucifixion took place on Friday, 3 April, AD 33. Other dates had been suggested in the past, and (until this paper) there seemed to be no reliable means of further adjudicating between them. What Humphreys and Waddington did was to break this logjam by taking seriously a phrase in the book of Acts quoting the prophet Joel and seeing if our knowledge of celestial mechanics could shed any further light on this issue.

The passage, quoted by Peter at Pentecost, refers to the sun turning to darkness and the moon turning to blood before the great and glorious day of the Lord will come. Rather than interpreting this metaphorically, Humphreys and Waddington note that this is a good description of a lunar eclipse, and that such phraseology (moon turning to blood) appears in other historical documents (for example, after Alexander the Great crossed the Tigris River in 331 BC). The two authors then use celestial mechanics to determine all lunar eclipses between AD 26-33 (the largest range of years during which Jesus could have been crucified) and determined that only one lunar eclipse was visible at Passover time from Jerusalem, and that it occurred on Friday, 3 April, AD 33.