A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN FRAMEWORK FOR EARTH HISTORY RESEARCH: INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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Introduction

Within the earth sciences, the modern creationist movement is commonly perceived as reactionary rather than innovative. Any theoretical capacity for discipline-wide innovation is limited by the inability of the comparatively small number of creationist workers to perform and publish research on the same scale as their secular peers. This difficulty was noted by Whitcomb and Morris (1961, p. 332)

> A complete reorientation of all the enormous accumulations of pertinent data and interpretations would take not a few hundred pages, but several large volumes at least, and would require the intensive efforts of a great number of specialists trained in the various areas of geology and geophysics.

Since that time, progress in creationist geological earth history research has proceeded on a limited basis (primarily because of the small numbers of researchers). No research to date has persuaded large numbers of the geologic profession to rethink and reject their commitment to naturalism and uniformitarianism.

Modern historical geology is primarily a paradigm-driven rather than a data-driven discipline. Therefore, changes in foundational assumptions are more crucial than the accumulation of specific examples in bringing about major changes. 'Proof by example' has certainly persuaded many and is an attractive method, but it is impossible to prove a paradigm by examples. That is not to imply that research investigating specific problems is inappropriate; indeed it forms the building blocks of any new approach to historical geology. But there must be an accepted understanding of the relative place of both paradigm and example, and an appreciation of the limits of empirical demonstration, if historical geology is to be changed.

What follows will be a series of papers which trace a logical sequence of steps that the authors believe are required for the development of a young-earth approach to earth history studies. We recognize and acknowledge the tremendous quantity and quality of work performed, both in the past and the present, by the secular geologic community, and demonstrate that countering their research by the accretion of a sufficient quantity of examples to support proposed concepts is neither necessary nor desirable. This conclusion is fortunate, because the last 35 years have demonstrated that such a program is impossible.

Instead, a twofold progression is proposed: (1) the replacement of the extrascientific naturalist-uniformitarian system† that is foundational to modern geology with a biblical Christian‡ alternative; and (2) the development of geologic models of earth history within that alternative framework. The first step must be taken on a metaphysical level, and without that step, piecemeal geologic studies done from a creationist perspective, while useful, will probably never generate the major shift in thought (i.e. paradigm shift) required to accomplish major changes in the discipline of geology.

Therefore, this series begins with an attack on the metaphysical system of naturalism-uniformitarianism by highlighting logical inconsistencies between foundational axioms and both conclusions and methods of that system. In the first paper we utilize a comparison of similarities between Christianity and modern naturalism to show how naturalism had been built on the foundation of biblical Christian axioms that are contradictory to the completed naturalistic structure, and which cannot be internally justified by naturalism. A positive demonstration of the consistency of the biblical Christian system in each of the failures of naturalism is presented in Parts I and II. In addition, methodological constraints in earth history research are described. Following the reviews outlined in Parts I and II, the focus begins to move from the metaphysical framework towards the development of geologic models of earth history within that framework.

Constraints on these models imposed outside of science are discussed. Although these constraints are not exhaustive, we are confident that their application will provide powerful tools for creationist geologists in the field. In the final paper we recognize the plausibility of interpreting geologic strata by comparison to an "ideal" stratigraphic chart, but we propose that this stratigraphic chart be event-oriented rather than centered on chronology. Although specifics of any proposed model may not be acceptable to all researchers, we believe that a common base should be extended as far as possible, and widely accepted by creationist geologists. It is intended that this series will provide a basis for future work by the authors, and hoped that it will similarly profit other workers interested in doing geological research within the biblical Christian system. The authors are both professional geologists, but only amateur philosophers and theologians. Parts of this series may seem elementary to professionals in theology and philosophy, and we welcome the supplementary explanation of those individuals. We are committed to the recognition that science, and especially historical

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†The term "naturalist-uniformitarian" is employed throughout this series as a blanket description of the system of thought that underlies most of modern secular geology. We recognize that at many places it is cumbersome, and at others it is not specific enough, but it does provide a consistent shortcut to label something that would otherwise multiply verbosity. We believe that professional earth scientists will immediately grasp the nuances implied by the authors, and for others we recommend Austin (1979) for insight into understanding the role of uniformitarianism in geology.

‡The term "biblical Christian" is employed throughout this series as a blanket description of the system of thought that underlies orthodox Christianity. We used "biblical" because many in our time appear to believe that Christianity does not depend on God's revelation as much as man's religious ability, and "Christian" because aspects of biblical revelation are common to religions other than Christianity.

geology, cannot function apart from reference to theology and philosophy as well as other disciplines. On the other hand, explicating those ties to the extent performed here may be novel to professional earth scientists, and may possibly be initially considered a waste of time and effort. Therefore we beg the indulgence of the professional theologians and philosophers in our often basic presentation of those issues, as well as that of fellow professional earth scientists in what may be to them a different perspective.

References

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Sediments Are on Continents: An Answer to Mr. Yake

Yake Comment:

> Many Flood geologists contend that both the ocean basins and continents consist of the same crust. If this were true, it would have resulted in most of the sedimentary rocks being found in the oceans when the Deluge swept across the continents. However, the scientific data do not support this concept. Can Flood geology explain what this means? (Yake, 1995)

For many years geoscientists (both uniformitarian and creationist) believed that the continents were fixed in place and had not moved. Land bridges were hypothesized in order to explain the migration of similar creatures seen across the vast oceans. Many of these land bridges had no physical evidence of their existence. This concept began to change in the early twentieth century.

The Continental Drift theory was originally proposed by Alfred Wegener in 1929 (Wegener, 1929). He based his proposal on the way the continents fit together (along the Atlantic Ocean side) and the corresponding match of fossils found in both South America and Africa. However, it was not until the early 1960's that the "Continental Drift" theory became more widely embraced as a result of oceanic studies performed during the 1940's and 1950's. Previous to that time no mechanism could be found to "move" the continents apart and, (as is typical in science) until one could be found, scientists were not ready to change their paradigm. With the discovery of sea-floor spreading centers and subduction zones, the Continental Drift theory became more widely accepted. It has been subsequently modified into the theory of Plate Tectonics and is now accepted by many geoscientists.

Many creationist geoscientists have also accepted the Plate Tectonic theory based on the evidences used to support it. Recently a major research project was presented by several creationist geoscientists in which they explained how the theory works very well within the framework of the young earth Creation/Flood model (see Austin et al., 1994). Today the concept of a Pangaean Supercontinent is accepted among creationists because it explains how God could have easily moved the animals to the Ark from across a single landmass. Otherwise, the animals would have had to travel thousands of miles across the various land bridges to get to the awaiting Ark.

One of the main requirements of the Plate Tectonic theory is that there be a density difference between that of oceanic crust and the continents. It has been scientifically demonstrated that the density of oceanic basalt is much greater than that of the continental rocks. So by accepting the Plate Tectonic theory, creationists would agree with the uniformitarians that there is a density difference between the oceanic and continental crusts. This density difference does result in the continents' lying atop the more dense basaltic mantle (which also composes the ocean basins).

Creationists advocate that the breakup of the Pangaean supercontinent (via Plate Tectonics) occurred at a very rapid rate. This is true whether it happened during or after the Flood. The only "source" of clastic materials would have come from the eroding landmass itself. I propose that the highest rate of erosion would have occurred mainly within the original 40 days and nights of rain with the "breaking of the fountains of the deep." The remaining "331 Flood Days" (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961, p. 8) reflect a period when "winds" blew across the face of the waters (Gen 8:1). These winds would serve to create currents. However, these currents would not erode the continental materials at the same rate as had occurred previously. These currents would have lower sediment carrying capacities such that less sediments would be moved during this period.

Sediments would only be transported as far as the water energy could keep them in suspension. It would also be correct to assume that the area of greatest carrying capacity would be on the continents where the water was the shallowest and the agitation would have resulted in the highest sediment carrying capacity. Moving off the continents would result in deeper water conditions with lower sediment carrying capacity. This would result in the Flood water dropping its sedimentary load along the continent edges much like the major rivers of today drop their sedimentary deposits where they enter the sea. This is what is seen along today's continent margins. Thick continental deposits have formed along the edges of many of the continents. These sedimentary deposits rest on top of the adjoining oceanic crust.

Where these deposits have formed is also a result of the type of continental margin found. Where there are trailing margins (e.g., the North American Atlantic Coast) the sediment accumulation is great. Where there are subduction margins (e.g., the North American Pacific Northwest) the sediment accumulation has been "swept under the continent."

The oceans contain deep sea oozes and volcanic ash deposits, but little to no continental sediments. This is because the sediments which underwent erosion would only be transported as far as the water carrying capacity would allow. I propose that with rapid separation of