

undoubtedly find much to like in this edition, and they cannot help but learn a great deal from it.

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Young, Davis A. *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982. 188 pp. Paperback, \$7.95.

In his second book-length contribution on issues of science and Scripture, Davis A. Young addresses the question of the appropriate Christian stance regarding the age of the earth. The eleven chapters are divided into three unequal but fairly distinct parts.

Part One, "Church History and the Age of the Earth," traces some principal trends in the discussion, beginning with the Greek philosophers, and continuing with Christian thinkers from the early church to the twentieth century. While a number of pre-Christian Greek writers held the earth to be very old, they had no means of determining just how old. A general distrust of Greek science led early-church writers to steer clear of its speculations. In the early-church period from Augustine onward, nearly all Christian theologians posited an age for the earth of about 5,500 years. The Renaissance brought a renewed interest in fossils and diluvial theories. Crucial to the development of geology in this period was the work on the principles of rock strata (stratigraphy) by Niels Steensen (Steno).

By 1750, Steno's framework began to influence the infant discipline of geology, leading to various neptunist (oceanic) and plutonic (volcanic) theories of sedimentation and fossil preservation. With increasing geological field work, it seemed clear to some that a short age could not be correct. Young demonstrates how the publication of early estimates of the age of the earth led Christians who wished to retain the Bible's creation account to propose harmonizations from what appeared to be two contradictory conclusions regarding the earth's age. The "restitution theory," proposed by some Christian theorists, suggested an indeterminate period between Gen 1:1 and 1:2ff. In addition, the "day-age theory" saw in the "days" of Gen 1 very long periods of time. Some exegetes began to question the completeness of the biblical chronologies upon which a young-earth view rests. In the twentieth century many theologians accommodated to the evidence of great-earth age, while many other Christians reacted with new commitments to the young-earth viewpoint that is characteristic of modern "scientific" creationism.

In Part Two, "Scientific Considerations and the Age of the Earth," Young reviews four avenues of scientific inquiry which have attracted the attention of short-chronology advocates. Young suggests that the evidence of geological stratigraphy, sedimentation, fossilization, and related areas,

far from establishing the theory of a young earth, provides ample evidence that considerable time was required to produce the present crust. In addition, he holds that radiometric dating methods are sufficiently well-grounded theoretically and have been refined enough to provide another unassailable category of evidence for a very old earth. Recent claims that earth's magnetic field is weakening at rates that can only be interpreted in short-chronology terms have not taken into account, claims Young, evidence for the great variability of the field's intensity in the last 6,000-8,000 years. Likewise, he posits, the arguments for a short chronology based on meteorites and tektites, the nickel content of the earth's crust, and sediment volumes also fail to stand up to more careful examination.

Part Three, "Philosophical and Apologetic Considerations Related to the Age of the Earth," addresses the initial question from a more positive point of view. Given what he considers as evidence that earth is extremely old, Young raises the query, How can Christian faith survive? Some Christians, he claims, hold an incorrect view of the uniformitarian principle, which they see as inadequate to explain geological phenomena. Modern geologists, he points out, use a principle of uniformity not unlike that used by many catastrophists. Modern geology does not reject catastrophes as such, but just the idea that one single worldwide catastrophe—the Deluge—can explain all sedimentary phenomena.

Christians, Young further asserts, should not try to prove that the Bible is true by science. Scripture and nature are alike from God, and therefore they *cannot* speak contrarily. If they *seem* to, the author argues, it is because we misunderstand one or the other. The nature of human understanding is such that we must *expect* "loose ends"—in theology, as well as in science.

While the facts of nature cannot dictate our exegesis of Scripture, Young claims, we may be led by scientific data to take another look at our interpretation of Scripture. But in no case should Christians be guilty of twisting either Scripture or nature in order to achieve artificial harmony. Geological evidence that indicates great age for the earth, postulates Young, is not at odds with the Bible. And he goes on to suggest that our exegesis should attempt to find the underlying harmony by appeal to Scripture itself. The classic day-age hypothesis regarding Gen 1, he concludes, provides a viable exegesis of Scripture that harmonizes biblical and natural data on the age of the earth.

Though my training has not been such that I feel qualified to judge the validity of much of the scientific information and argument presented by Young, it does appear that he raises a number of crucial questions regarding certain creationist arguments against a long-earth chronology. Also, while I may disagree on specifics, I believe Young rightly formulates the relationship between nature and Scripture. Should Christians interpret the Bible by data from the natural world—or *vice versa*? Or should we rather use data

from each, carefully and sympathetically interpreted, to derive a more-or-less harmonious view of such things as the age of the earth and the universal Flood? At the very least, we should be willing to make Young's confession that we may not always see all things absolutely clearly.

My greatest problem is in regard to Young's exegetical treatment of Gen 1. This relates to a field in which I have had considerable training, in contrast to my relative lack of such in the fields of physical and biological science. In regard to his exegetical work, his general hermeneutical theory may be sound (p. 159), but in the case of the "day-age" theory his application is wrong. The arguments in favor of the "day-age" view are advanced in Young's earlier book (*Creation and the Flood* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1977]), and only affirmed in the present volume.

My criticism of the "day-age" theory is not simply a conservative short-chronology reaction. The question that Young fails to answer is, What did the inspired author of Genesis mean by "day"? It is my exegetical conviction that the only answer is "a twenty-four hour period." This conclusion obviously leaves unrelieved the tension that Young's exegesis seeks to relieve. I too would like to bring this tension into balance, but I *cannot* do so by making Genesis say something it does not mean. Although Young is prepared to live with some "loose ends" (p. 155), he is apparently not prepared to live with this one! But which is worse—to live with an unrelieved tension between biblical and scientific data, or to force a view on Genesis that may not conform to its intent?

Young asserts repeatedly that Christian faith in Scripture is not weakened by recognizing the evidences for a long chronology of the earth. On the other hand, I am not sure that faith in the Bible is effectively strengthened by a scientizing exegesis of Gen 1.

Since Young is offering a compromise position on a very complex issue, it is unlikely that people on either extreme will be pleased with his conclusions. In my judgment, Young has raised important questions. And after all, creationists and those who would advocate a short chronology are not about to *abandon* science. Indeed, no matter where Christians come down on the issue of the age of the earth, they will have to come to terms with the relationship between science and Scripture. Young's work contributes to this ongoing discussion.

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