

# Christian Theodicy in Light of Genesis and Modern Science: A Young-Earth Creationist Response to William Dembski

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## Abstract

The problem of evil is always a challenge for the Christian witness. Human suffering and moral evil are relatively easy for the apologist to explain, and the Fall of Adam is a key to that explanation. But the thornier question is that of natural evil (disasters like hurricanes, volcanoes, earthquakes) that kill not only people but innocent animals. In particular, if we accept millions of years of animal death, disease and extinction before Adam was even created, how do we explain that in light of God's attributes and purposes? William Dembski has published a 54-page response to this question. He explains his reasons for rejecting the young-earth creationist theodicy and several old-earth theodicies and proposes a solution that accommodates the millions of years of natural evil which evolutionary scientists insist occurred before man appeared. This paper will analyze and critique Dembski's proposal, showing it to be inadequate and inconsistent with Scripture and contending that only the young-earth view gives an adequate and biblically sound answer to the problem of natural evil. It is therefore a powerful apologetic to make the Christian witness effective in our evolutionized world.

**Keywords:** theodicy, natural evil, Fall, chronological time (days), kairological time (days), preemptive, causal-temporal logic, teleological-semantic logic, framework hypothesis, old-earth, young-earth, authority, assumptions

## Introduction

The problem of evil is always a challenge for the Christian witness. Human suffering and moral evil are relatively easy for the apologist to explain, and the Fall of Adam is a key to that explanation. But the thornier question is that of natural evils such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and the tsunami in Asia at the end of 2004, as well as smaller scale floods, tornados, volcanoes, plagues, etc. which kill not only people but also innocent animals and destroy beautiful scenery. If there is a good and omnipotent Creator God who cares about His creation, then why is the world like this? In particular, if we accept millions of years of animal death, disease and extinction before Adam was even created, how do we explain that in light of God's attributes and purposes? Or does this natural evil stand as incontrovertible proof that the God of the Bible does not exist?

William Dembski, a leader in the Intelligent Design movement and a professor of philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, has published a 54-page web article responding to this question.<sup>1</sup> He explains his reasons for rejecting the young-earth creationist theodicy and several old-earth theodicies and proposes a solution that seeks to harmonize the traditional orthodox Christian view of the Fall with the millions of years of natural evil which evolutionary scientists claim

have occurred before man first appeared on the earth.

This paper will analyze Dembski's proposal, showing it to be inadequate and inconsistent with Scripture and contending that only the young-earth view gives an adequate and biblically sound answer to the problem of natural evil. It is therefore a powerful apologetic to make the Christian witness effective in our evolutionized world.

## Views Dembski Rejects

### *The nature of the Fall*

Dembski reasons well in rejecting several views of the Fall (pp. 7–10). Patricia Williams believes that the Fall was good—a liberation from self-imposed and biological constraints. John Polkinghorne sees the Fall as the inevitable cost of God giving freedom to humans and non-personal inanimate creation. Referring natural evil to the freedom of creation rather than to the Fall is a consistent pattern in liberal theology,<sup>2</sup> says Dembski. But he rightly points out that such theodicies of freedom create worse problems than they solve, one problem being the sacrifice of freedom. He asks,

Shouldn't the freedom of creation give us the freedom not to sin? And shouldn't it be possible for God to create a world whose freedom is not destructive and does not entail natural evil? (p. 10).

<sup>1</sup> Dembski 2007. I am responding to version 2.3, dated 15 March, 2007, last accessed 18 February, 2009. After finishing this paper, I learned that Dembski had expanded the paper into a book, (Dembski 2009). But the argument in the book is essentially the same as in the paper. Dembski's paper is unfortunately no longer available on the web.

<sup>2</sup> Dembski 2007. Dembski calls it "contemporary theology" (p. 8) and "mainstream theology" (p. 7) but I suspect most evangelicals would call what he describes liberal theology.

John Hick believes the Fall had negative consequences but also is a means of making people better souls as they respond to evil. But as Dembski points out, there is a terribly high percentage of people who drop out or flunk out of the soul-making school. Another strategy is that of process or openness theologies, which present God as having good intentions but weak abilities in dealing with evil. Dembski is right to conclude that none of these views provides a satisfactory understanding of the Fall.

### **The connection of natural evil to human sin**

Dembski tells us that “identifying human sin as responsible for the world’s evil has become increasingly difficult to square” with our modern intellectual environment (p.11). He quotes and discusses a number of professing Christians who deny this traditional understanding of the Fall. C.S. Lewis attributed natural evil to Satan, although in Lewis’s book *The Problem of Pain*, which Dembski cites, Lewis provided no biblical justification for his view. Dembski helpfully points out other serious theological difficulties with Lewis’s view.

John Polkinghorne accepts human evolution from ape-like creatures as fact and simply asserts that man’s sin caused neither death nor any changes to the cosmos. Ian Barbour says that we must reformulate traditional ideas of the Fall and blatantly rejects Paul’s teaching in Romans 5:12 that death came into the world because of Adam’s sin. Patrick Miller uses Isaiah 24–27 to deny that human acts and cosmic effects can be linked in any intelligible manner. And Jürgen Moltmann rejects the traditional view by asserting that to tie the sin of man to the death of animals and plants and the extinction of dinosaurs would be a “negative self-deification of human beings” by laying on man too great a guilt. Dembski concludes that these likewise are unacceptable views.

In contrast to these views, Dembski does accept the traditional view that all natural evil is traceable to the personal evil of Adam and Eve. But his acceptance of the millions of years requires him to propose a way for the consequences of Adam’s Fall to occur in history *before* the Fall. He does so because he finds other, professing-evangelical, old-earth theodicies unsatisfactory (pp.25–28). For example, he rejects Hugh Ross’s view that God used randomness, waste and inefficiencies to bring about the “very good” world. He finds fault with Mark Whorton’s end-justifies-the-means attempt to justify God making a less than perfect creation by saying that God’s ultimate purpose (yet to be realized in the future) is paradise.

Dembski also discards David Snoke’s strategy of treating natural evil as morally insignificant and rather as a virtue (not a defect) of creation and as a form of divine pleasure. Dembski’s brief refutation of these theodicies is helpful.

### **Young-earth creationist view**

Dembski accurately, though briefly, summarizes the young-earth view of the Fall (pp. 11–12), calling it “the traditional reading of Genesis,” which it certainly is in the history of the church.<sup>3</sup>

He indicates that young-earth creationists invariably cite Romans 5:12 to show that all death (human and animal) came as a consequence of sin. Unfortunately, he only cites one concrete example: Henry Morris’s 1974 book *Scientific Creationism*. Dembski says that

young-earth creationists have an easier time of it, both exegetically and theologically, in interpreting this passage [Romans 5:12] as speaking about all death and not just human death (p. 17).

In context, however, Romans 5:12 is speaking only of human death. Other passages must be used to argue that there was no animal death before the Fall, as will be discussed below.

A superficial reading of Morris and other young-earth proponents could lead one to think that they are using Romans 5:12 as the trump card for their position. However, a more careful analysis of their use of the verse in context shows that it is used in conjunction with others or as a summary statement about the connection of the Fall to death rather than as the only or primary proof that there was no animal death before the Fall. For example, Dembski refers to six separate pages in Henry Morris’s 1974 *Scientific Creationism*, which do indeed all mention Romans 5:12 (Morris 1974, pp.208, 211, 226, 229, 243, 245). However, on page 229 Morris says,

The Bible is quite explicit in teaching that there was no suffering and no death of sentient life in the world before man brought sin into the world (Genesis 3: 14–19, Romans 5:12; 8:20–23; 1 Corinthians 15:21, 22; Revelation 21:4, 5; etc.).

And on page 245 Morris says, “The effects of the great Curse on the earth are discussed in a classic passage in Romans 8:18–25.” Also, in *The Biblical Basis of Modern Science*, Morris uses Romans 8:22 and Genesis 3:17–19 to say that the Fall brought about a drastic amendment to the second law of thermodynamics and extended the curse beyond man to all of man’s dominion and indeed the whole creation (Morris 1984, 2002).<sup>4</sup> Many other creationists

<sup>3</sup> For a historical analysis of Luther’s, Calvin’s, Wesley’s and the nineteenth century Scriptural geologists’ views on natural evil and the Fall, in comparison to the views of old-earth proponents in the early nineteenth century, see Ury 2008, pp.399–424. This chapter is based on his Ph.D. thesis (Ury 2001). For a review of Eastern Orthodox views on the subject see Mortenson 2002 (esp. p. 50).

<sup>4</sup> See Morris 2002, p. 181, as well as Morris 1984, pp. 196–197.

have been careful to reason in the same way (Ham 2006, pp.53–54, 263–265; Mortenson 2006c, pp.5–7; Sarfati 2004, pp.195–224; Stambaugh 2008, pp.373–398).

The brevity and somewhat misleading nature of Dembski's summary of the young-earth position requires supplementation. The biblical teaching on death is very clear and consistent from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis 1 says six times that God called the creation "good." When He finished creation on Day 6, He called everything "very good." Man, animals and birds were originally vegetarian according to Genesis 1:29–30. Plants are not living in the same sense as people, animals, and birds are, according to this and other Scripture passages. Plants are never called "living creatures" (Hebrew: *nephesh chayyah*) as people, land animals, birds and sea creatures are called (Genesis 1:20–21, 24, 30; 2:7; 6:19–20 and 9:10–17) (Sarfati 2005, Stambaugh 1991a, Todhunter 2006). So plant death is not the same as animal or human death (cf. Job 14:7–12, John 12:24).

Adam and Eve sinned, resulting in the judgment of God on the whole creation. Instantly Adam and Eve died spiritually, evidenced by their hiding from God. But they also began to die physically, and Paul clearly had physical death in mind in Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 (as the context shows) when he says that death came into the human race through Adam's sin. The serpent was cursed, along with other animals, resulting in a physical change. It is reasonable to assume that the other cursed animals were also altered physically in some way (Genesis 3:14). Eve was changed physically to have increased pain in child-birth (Genesis 3:16). And the ground itself was cursed (Genesis 3:17–19), a fact which was still on the minds of people 1,000 years later when Noah was born (Genesis 5:29). The whole earth was cursed again at Noah's Flood (Genesis 8:22). The whole creation now groans in bondage to corruption (because of the Genesis 3 curse) waiting for the final act in the redemption of Christians—giving them immortal resurrected bodies (Romans 8:19–25).<sup>5</sup>

When that redemptive event happens, we will see the restoration and redemption of all things (Acts 3:21 and Colossians 1:20) to a state similar to the pre-Fall world. Then there will be no more carnivorous behavior (Isaiah 11:6–9) and no disease, suffering, or death (Revelation 21:3–5) because there will be no more curse (Revelation 22:3).<sup>6</sup> To accept millions of years of animal death before the creation and Fall of man contradicts and destroys not only the Bible's teaching on death but also undermines its teaching on the full redemptive work of Christ.

If God cursed the earth with thorns after Adam sinned (as Genesis 3:18 says)<sup>7</sup>, then why do we find fossil thorns in rocks that the evolutionists claim are about 350 million years old?<sup>8</sup> If the millions of years are true, then God lied. Thorns and thistles didn't arise in the earth after Adam sinned but had been part of creation for hundreds of millions of years. If Genesis 3:18 is true, then the millions of years are a lie. Whether the thorns and thistles were new plant kinds that God created *de novo* after the fall or God simply tweaked the genetics of some plants created on Day 3 so that after the Fall they grew thorns, we cannot say. But if Genesis 3:18 is correct that they appeared in the creation as a consequence of the Fall, then the rock layers that contain thorny plants cannot be millions of years old.

Were arthritis and cancer in the "very good" world before man sinned? If the evolutionists' dating methods are correct, the answer must be "yes." Many kinds of disease have been found in the fossil record, including arthritis, abscesses, and tumors in dinosaur bones dated to be 110 million years old. A researcher of these bones tell us that "diseases look the same through time ... it makes no difference whether this is now or a hundred million years ago" (Anonymous 1998). There is also considerable evidence of rickets, syphilis, dental disease, etc., in human fossil bones that evolutionists date to be tens or hundreds of thousands of years before any biblically plausible date for Adam (Lubenow 1998). If the Bible is true, then those dates are false and there was no pre-Fall death and disease.

<sup>5</sup> This is the dominant interpretation of Romans 8:19–23 in the history of the Church, which is understandable since this is the only interpretation that really makes sense exegetically and theologically. See Moo 1996, pp.513–514; Murray 1968/1993, pp.301–302; Schreiner 1998, pp.435–434.

<sup>6</sup> While I am inclined to think that Isaiah 11:6–9 refers to the literal 1,000-year millennium right before the eternal state begins, I am not certain on that point. But, even if that is wrong, clearly the passage is speaking of a future state of affairs that is very different from the present, for it will be a time when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth as the water covers the seas. In that righteous world both man and the animals will be significantly changed. Surely in the eternal state this change in the animals will continue. The point is that carnivorous behavior is part of the fallen world, not the period before the Fall or after the return of Christ, when the knowledge of the Lord and righteousness will indeed fill the earth.

<sup>7</sup> Some might object that God cursed the Garden of Eden with thorns. But this objection fails for three reasons. First, why would God curse the Garden with thorns and tell Adam about it, when Adam was going to be expelled from the Garden? Second, the ground that God cursed with thorns was the same ground outside the Garden that Adam would sweat over to provide food for himself and his family. Third, the Hebrew words for "curse" and "ground" in Genesis 3:17 are the same as those used in Genesis 5:29, which speak of the cursed ground in Noah's day.

<sup>8</sup> Stewart and Rothwell 1993, pp.172–176. It shows fossilized thorny plants (*Psilophyton crenulatum*) found in the Devonian formation, which the evolutionists date at 345–395 million years BP (before present).

Evolutionists believe that over the course of a half billion years there were five major extinction events/periods,<sup>9</sup> when 65–90% of all species living at those particular times went extinct. If this was the way the creation was for millions of years, then what impact on the creation did the Fall have? None. Contrary to what the Bible says, it would have only caused spiritual death in man. In fact, we can go further and say that if the millions of years of death and extinction really did occur, then that “very good” creation was considerably *worse* than the world we now inhabit, where local habitats are polluted or destroyed and a single species is occasionally brought to extinction due to human sin, but where we do not see global extinctions of large percentages of species. We have never seen in post-Fall human history<sup>10</sup> the kind of mass-kill, extinction events that the evolutionary geologists say occurred before man came into existence. So, if the millions of years really happened, then the Fall actually improved the world from what it was in the “very good” pre-Fall creation.<sup>11</sup> In this case, the curse at the Fall would actually be a blessing! So, if the Bible’s teaching on death, the curse and the final redemptive work of Christ is true, then the millions-of-years idea must be a grand myth, really a lie. Conversely, if the millions of years really happened, then the Bible’s teaching on these subjects must be utterly false, which is devastating for the gospel.

Dembski attempts to get around this logical predicament by proposing that the millions of years of animal death occurred before man sinned because God knew ahead of time that man would sin. To that proposal we now turn.

### Dembski’s View

Dembski seems to take the Fall and the details of the events in Genesis 3 as literal straightforward history (p. 11). That is good, for it is senseless to try to harmonize natural evil with a mythical Fall.

He says his paper argues that cosmic and transhistorical consequences to

human sin are eminently tenable, though not because, as young earth creationists suggest, the science of astrophysics and geology got it wrong about the age of the Earth and universe. In fact, I’m going to argue that viewing natural evil as a consequence of the Fall is entirely compatible with mainstream understandings of cosmic and natural history (p. 13).

He does this by proposing that God brought about millions of years of animal suffering, disease and death and other natural evils *preemptively* before Adam sinned because in His foreknowledge He knew that Adam would sin.

Several lines of argument are presented in defense of this proposal. First, he attempts to argue that there are two different kinds of time discussed in the New Testament: *kairos* and *chronos*. Dembski cites a standard Greek-English lexicon (Bauer 1979). to say that *chronos* denotes mere duration of time in contrast to *kairos* which denotes time in combination with purpose. With a lengthy quote he more heavily relies on definitions by the very liberal Paul Tillich. In the quote (p. 20) Tillich says that *chronos* is “clock time, time which is measured” whereas *kairos* “is not the quantitative time of the watch, but is the qualitative time of the occasion.” From this Dembski reasons that

The visible realm thus operates according to *chronos*, the simple passage of time. But the invisible realm, in which God resides, operates according to *kairos*, the ordering of reality according to divine purposes. Of the two forms of time, *kairos* is the more basic. *Chronos* is the time of physics, and physics has only been around as long as the cosmos. But *kairos* is God’s time, and God has been around forever. The *chronos-kairos* distinction underwrites such scriptural assertions as “One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (2 Peter 3:8) And yet, *chronos* and *kairos* are not utterly separate. When the visible and invisible realms intersect, *kairos* becomes evident within *chronos*. The creation of the world and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity

<sup>9</sup> The names and approximate evolutionary dates of the supposed five major extinction events are these: Late Ordovician (440 million years ago [MYA], 100+ families of marine invertebrates perished, <http://park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/ordmass.html>, accessed 11 August 2009); Late Devonian (365MYA, 70% of marine invertebrates perished along with other marine life, <http://park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/devmass.html>, accessed 11 August 2009); Permian-Triassic (245MYA, greatest mass extinction event, 90–95% of marine species extinct), Late Triassic (210MYA, at least 50% of species extinct, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triassic%E2%80%93Jurassic\\_extinction\\_event](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triassic%E2%80%93Jurassic_extinction_event), accessed 11 August 2009); Cretaceous-Tertiary (65MYA, second largest mass extinction, 85% of all species, including all dinosaurs). See <http://park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/cretmass.html> (accessed 11 August 2009), <http://park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/massextinc.html>. The Canadian website bases its information on Stanley 1987.

<sup>10</sup> That is, if we rule out Noah’s Flood as a global Flood—which we logically must do if we accept millions of years. The same scientific establishment that dogmatically states that the geological record reflects millions of years of history also insists that there is no geological evidence of a global Flood. To accept what the secular geologists say about the first point but to reject what they say about the second point is inconsistent. But to believe in a global Flood that left no lasting erosional and sedimentary geological evidence is most unreasonable. So we must decide. Either we believe God’s Word about a global Flood or we believe in millions of years. We cannot with logical consistency believe in both.

<sup>11</sup> A theistic evolutionist might object that since the mass-kill events occur millions of years apart, human history simply has not been long enough yet to witness the next mass-kill event. But that would be assuming the very point in question. We have no basis in Scripture to expect that in the future before Jesus comes again, the earth will experience a global event that would be almost as catastrophic for life as the global Flood of Noah was. Both Jesus (Matthew 24:37–39) and Peter (2 Peter 3:3–7) indicate that the next globe-changing event after Noah’s Flood will be the Second Coming of Christ.

are the preeminent instances of this intersection. (p.21)

So, according to Dembski, *chronos* is our time in the visible realm and *kairos* is God's time in the invisible realm, inaccessible to physics (or presumably any other field of science). On pages 21 and 36 he says that *chronos* is "natural history" but that *kairos* is "the order of creation" (which on page 19 he defines as the Reformed view of "the order of divine decrees"). On page 36 he indicates that *kairos* is non-linear time. And later he says that *chronos* is "ordinary chronological time" but that *kairos* is "time from the vantage of God's purposes" (p. 40).

Besides distinguishing between two kinds of time, Dembski also discusses two "logics of creation." On page 36 he says that causal-temporal logic (C-T logic) "is bottom-up and looks at the world from the vantage of physical causality" whereas teleological-semantic logic (T-S logic) "is top-down and looks at the world from the vantage of divine intention and action." C-T logic is "the organizing principle for natural history (*chronos*)" but T-S logic "is the organizing principle for the order of creation (*kairos*)."

In Dembski's scheme, God operates in *kairos* time and with T-S logic. So, He acted "preemptively [through millions of years of natural evil and animal death] to anticipate human actions" in the Fall (p. 37). He adds later that God acted

preemptively to anticipate the novel events induced by God's prior actions (priority here being conceived not temporally or causally [*chronos*] but in terms of the teleological-semantic logic [*kairos*] by which God orders the creation). And yet, such actions by God now induce still further novel events. And so on. This up and back between divine action and creaturely causation proceeds indefinitely (p. 38).

In light of his definitions of *chronos* and *kairos* and these two kinds of logic, Dembski concludes,

Accordingly, the days of creation are neither exact 24-hour days (as in young-earth creationism) nor epochs in natural history (as in old-earth creationism) nor even a literary device (as in the literary-framework theory). Rather, the days of creation in Genesis are actual (literal!) episodes in the divine creative activity. They represent key divisions in the divine order of creation, with one episode building logically on its predecessor. As a consequence, their description as chronological days needs to be viewed as an instance of the common scriptural practice of employing physical realities to illuminate deeper spiritual realities (cf. John 3:12)" (p. 40, parentheses and emphasis in the original).

It is a bit of a mystery to me how the days can be "literal" and "actual," but not literal days, nor geological ages, nor a literary device, but still be "episodes in the divine creative activity." Nor do I see how Dembski's

"days" can be divisions in the divine order of creation that are logically sequential (though not very logical, as I will show below), but not chronologically sequential. And just exactly how and when do the millions of years of animal suffering, disease, death and extinction and other forms of natural evil (which look just like the kinds of natural evil we see in our chronological time and which the evolutionists say happened in that same kind of chronological time that we live in) fit into these kairological "days?" Dembski doesn't say. It also escapes my understanding why God would confuse us by describing these as chronological days (though allegedly not in chronological sequence, in spite of being numbered as such) when in fact He is talking about kairological time in the invisible realm when creatures get buried and fossilized in sediments by the billions to be found millions of years later in chronological time.

Furthermore, I'm inclined to understand John 3:12 to mean that if we can't believe what Jesus, as God, says in His Word about earthly things that we can verify (such as His creation of distinct kinds of creatures to reproduce after their kind but not to change into a different kind, and a global catastrophic Flood, and the judgment of Sodom, and the exodus of Israel, etc.), then how can we trust what He says about heavenly things, which we cannot verify this side of heaven (except by faith), such as heaven and hell and forgiveness of sins? But I will leave these questions and go on to my other criticisms of Dembski's proposal.

### Critique of Dembski's View

#### *His use of vague terms at key points*

Dembski says that the "challenge of [his] paper is to develop a credible theodicy that is also consonant with Christian theism" (p.2). Similarly, he says that "Christians, in formulating a specifically Christian theodicy, need to look to Christian theology" to have and justify the right attitude toward the problem (p.3). I submit that this focus on "Christian theology" or "Christian theism" is an inadequate target to begin with. The goal ought to be to develop a theodicy that is consistent with properly interpreted biblical revelation. We must pay careful attention to the biblical text in working out our response to the problem of evil. "Christian theism" or "Christian theology" is too vague and with that target we can arrive at an apparent consonance that cannot be harmonized with the details of the biblical text, as I hope to show.

Also, Dembski frequently speaks of the conflict between the traditional, young-earth creationist view and "our knowledge of the world, especially in light of modern science" (p. 13) or "the science of astrophysics and geology" (p. 13) or "contemporary science" (p. 33). He says that "natural history as described by modern science appears irreconcilable with the order of

creation as described by Genesis” (p.18).<sup>12</sup> But this choice of words is misleading and plays into the hands of the evolutionists who insist that “science” proves millions of years and that the idea that the creation is only thousands of years is not “science” but religious belief (based on the unscientific Bible).

In reality, the debate about the age of the universe is a conflict of worldviews—a conflict between the evolutionary, naturalistic, uniformitarian *interpretations* of some of the scientific data, on the one hand, and on the other hand the exegetically strong and historically orthodox young-earth creationist understanding of Scripture and the interpretations of the same data and more data based on biblical assumptions. These evolutionary *interpretations* are based on anti-biblical philosophical *assumptions* that dominate the modern scientific enterprise. But the scientific methods do not require these secular assumptions nor was modern science developed on the basis of these assumptions. Rather, it developed in the womb of the biblical worldview (Hooykaas 1972).

It is a troubling mystery that in his acceptance of old-earth geology and astronomy Dembski, as a philosopher, seems to ignore this critically important philosophical point that young-earth creationists have been making for years in both scholarly and popular literature and in DVDs (Ham 1999; Ham 2003; Morris 1989; Mortenson 2004a, 2005, 2006b; Reed 2001). In other writings Dembski sees and comments on philosophical naturalism’s control of biology, (Dembski 1999, pp.97–121; 2005, chapters 2, 4, 5 and 13)<sup>13</sup> but he seems to overlook or be indifferent to that same philosophical domination of geology and astronomy, which has resulted in the claim about millions of years.

### **His discussion of two Greek time words**

By way of introduction to his discussion of the New Testament Greek words for time, *chronos* and *kairos*, Dembski reasons,

Creation, according to Genesis, is a progression of effected words spoken by God. This progression has an inherent logic since for one word to take effect depends on others having taken effect (e.g., the creation of fish presupposes the creation of water). This logic is what is meant by the order of creation

(cf. the order of divine decrees in reformed theology). Accordingly, we can think of the order of creation as history from the vantage of divine intention and action. This top-down view of history regards creation as a drama produced, directed, and written by God and sees the logic of this history as the pattern of purposes that God intends for creation. History from such a divine perspective contrasts with our ordinary, bottom-up view of history, often referred to as natural history. Natural history confines history to space and time and sees the logic of history as determined by physical causality. (p. 19)

There are many problems with this reasoning. First, there is not a completely inherent logic to the order of creation events in Genesis 1. Light was created before the sun, moon and stars. Plants were created before the sun. And plants were created before the creatures that enable plants to pollinate (a fact, by the way, which points to the days being literal 24-hour days).<sup>14</sup> Second, the history of the whole Bible is ultimately from the vantage of divine intention and action. “Natural history” covers the same period of time-space reality as does biblical history, and the Creation Week is the first seven days of natural history. Third, Christians should have a top-down view of history, not a worldly bottom-up view of natural history adopted from the atheists and deists. Our “ordinary, bottom up view of history” is a fallen, man-centered, secular view, which should be rejected by Christians. We should be biblically minded, not thinking like the lost world.

Also, Dembski’s reference to the *BAGD* lexicon reveals a failure to note that the lexicon’s general definition for *kairos* is “time, i.e. point of time as well as a period of time” and *chronos* is “time, mostly in the sense [of] a period of time.” And the lexicon’s many examples in both cases show that this is time in our time-space world. The lexicon simply does not support Dembski’s distinction of *kairos* from *chronos*.

Furthermore, Dembski offered no analysis of the New Testament uses of *chronos* and *kairos*. When that is done, a very different picture emerges, one that shows that Dembski’s definitions (as well as Tillich’s definitions on which Dembski relies) are utterly false. Whatever the nuanced differences in meaning these two Greek words have, their use does not support

<sup>12</sup> Dembski is right. Apart from discussions about the length of the days of Genesis 1, the order of events there contradicts the evolutionary story in at least 30 points. See Mortenson 2006a.

<sup>13</sup> Dembski 1998. See the statement in his summary of the ID movement:

The Intelligent Design movement begins with the work of Charles Thaxton, Walter Bradley, Michael Denton, Dean Kenyon, and Phillip Johnson. Without employing the Bible as a scientific text, these scholars critiqued Darwinism on scientific and philosophical grounds. On scientific grounds they found Darwinism an inadequate framework for biology. On philosophical grounds they found Darwinism hopelessly entangled with naturalism, the view that nature is self-sufficient and thus without need of God or any guiding intelligence.

<sup>14</sup> How could plants reproduce and survive for millions of years waiting for the creatures to be created that would enable them to reproduce? Similarly, how could the plants survive millions of years of dark at the beginning of the fourth “day”? Only if the days were literal do we not have a problem. Plants can easily survive 12 literal hours of darkness.

the dichotomy that Dembski and Tillich assert. Both terms refer to our time-space reality.

For example, both words refer to points in our time (both specific times and indefinite times). Stephen said in Acts 7:17, “But as the time (*chronos*) of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt.” This was certainly a time in the purpose of God. But in Mark 13:33 Jesus tells us to be alert because we “do not know when the appointed time (*kairos*) will come.”

Also, in Luke 18:30 Jesus speaks of “this time” (*kairos*), referring to the first century earthly time, in contrast to “the age to come” heavenly time when we have “eternal life.”

Both words are used to refer to the time of birth of a man. *Chronos* is used in Luke 1:57 with respect to the time of Jesus’s birth and in Matthew 2:7 in relation to John the Baptist’s birth. On the other hand, *kairos* is used in Acts 7:20 regarding the time of the birth of Moses and again in Romans 9:9 in speaking of the time of Isaac’s birth.

Christ came in the “fullness of time (*chronos*)” (Galatians 4:4), referring to Christ’s coming to accomplish redemption in time-space history, but He died “at the right time (*kairos*)” (Romans 5:6). Also, in John 7:6 Jesus is referring to His work of redemption on the cross and the Pharisees work related to that event when He says to them, “My time (*kairos*) is not yet here, but your time (*kairos*) is always opportune.” In John 7:8 He adds, “My time (*kairos*) has not yet fully come.” But Luke 1:57 tells us that “the time (*chronos*) had come for Elizabeth to give birth.”

In Acts 1:6 the disciples asked Jesus before His ascension if He was restoring the kingdom “at this time” (*chronos*). But in Luke 21:8 Jesus warns about false teachers who will say “the time (*kairos*) [of the kingdom] is near” when in fact it is not near.

Every use of *kairos* refers to our time-space reality. For example, “about that time” Herod laid hands on believers (Acts 12:1). Paul told the magician Elymas that he would not see the sun (be blinded) “for a time” (Acts 13:11). Felix said he would summon Paul to hear more “when I find time” (Acts 24:25). God demonstrated His righteousness through the death of Christ “at the present time” (Romans 3:26) and “at the present time” a remnant of Jews believed the gospel (Romans 11:5). Paul told the Corinthians that “at this present time” their generous giving was meeting the needs of other believers (2 Corinthians 8:14). He taught that Christians should not be surprised by the suffering of “this present time” (Romans 8:18), that married Christians should abstain from sexual relations “for a time” (1 Corinthians 7:5), that

“the time has been shortened” in which they could serve the Lord in this life (1 Corinthians 7:29), and that “now is the acceptable time” to respond to the gospel—in the day of salvation (1 Corinthians 6:2). He said that “in due time” we would reap, if we didn’t give up in our labors for Him (Galatians 6:9). “At that time” Jesus said a prayer (Matthew 11:25) and “at that time” Jesus went through the grain fields (Matthew 12:1). “At that time” Herod heard some news (Matthew 14:1) and “at that time” the Gentiles were separated from Christ (Ephesians 2:12). Often the gospel writers refer to “the time of the harvest” (for example, Matthew 13:30; Matthew 21:34; Luke 20:10). Paul instructed Christians to “make the most of the time” (Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5). He also said that “the time will come” when men will not endure sound doctrine. And “in his time” (that is, in Antichrist’s time, not in God’s time), Antichrist will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:6). All these uses show that *kairos* refers to our time-space reality, not the invisible realm of God.

This is no different than the use of *chronos* with respect to our time-space history. For example, Paul wanted to remain with the Corinthian believers “for some time” when he visited them (1 Corinthians 16:7) and at one point he desired not to “spend time in Asia” (Acts 20:16). Luke speaks of a “moment of time” (Luke 4:5), “a long time” (Luke 8:27) and a “considerable time [that] had passed” (Acts 27:9). Paul and Barnabas “spent time” in Antioch (Acts 15:33) and Paul reminded the Ephesian elders of “the whole time” he was with them.

There is simply no biblical basis for Dembski’s (and Tillich’s) differentiation of the significance of *chronos* and *kairos*. All time is God’s time, not just some events in time-space history. He created time, sovereignly rules over time, sees all of time in one eternal moment, entered time in Jesus and will bring time (as we know it now) to an end.

Furthermore, Dembski’s kairological reading of Genesis 1 produces bad exegesis. On page 42, he states that

On the first day, the most basic form of energy is created: light. With all matter and energy ultimately convertible to and from light, day one describes the beginning of physical reality.

He adds in footnote 72 on the same page that “the origin of physical reality [was] the creation of light on day 1.” To justify these views exegetically he does not deal with the biblical text himself, but refers his readers to a sermon in a “neo-evangelical” book.<sup>15</sup> But Genesis 1:1–3 teaches us that God created the earth covered with water before He created light. So, all physical reality did not come from the creation of

<sup>15</sup> As Dembski notes, the sermon was by Marguerite Shuster (Shuster 1991, pp. 506–512). The terrible consequences of Jewett’s egalitarian teachings since Jewett’s book (Jewett 1975) on the subject are discussed and documented masterfully by Grudem (2006).

light, according to Genesis.

Dembski claims that

Genesis 1 omits and abbreviates many details of creation. Nor does it provide insight into how the divine purposes of creation were implemented chronologically (p. 43).

On the contrary, the chronological details of the repeated refrain of “there was evening and there was morning, the Xth day”<sup>16</sup> provides tremendous insight into God’s creative acts, which He Himself affirms in six days, days of the same length as the Israelites’ prescribed work-week (Exodus 20:8–11). So, what is clear is that Dembski’s kairological reading of Genesis 1 involves ignoring many biblical details.

### ***On his comparison to Christ being “slain from the foundation of the world”***

Dembski says that “the theodicy I propose is entirely compatible with the view expressed in Revelation 13:8.” It is true that some translations of this verse say that Christ was slain “from the foundation of the world.”<sup>17</sup> But the Greek here is ambiguous, which is why many translations attach the phrase “from the foundation of the world” to “whose name had not been written.”<sup>18</sup> So this verse does not provide reliable support for his theodicy.

But there is another problem with this line of Dembski’s argument. Even if the text is teaching that Christ was slain before the foundation of the world, that death only happened in the mind and purposes of God. He did not *actually* die in time-space history before Pilate had Him nailed to the cross. However, according to evolutionary theory, the animals did actually suffer from cancer and other diseases and did die and did go extinct in actual time-space history for millions of years before man. They did not simply suffer and die in the mind and plans of God. The death of Christ and the death of billions of animals are therefore not analogous deaths in relation to time.

### ***On his response to the RATE research***

Recently the RATE project was completed. RATE stands for Radioisotopes and the Age of The Earth. Completed in 2005, it was an international 8-year research effort involving eight creation scientists with PhDs in the fields of physics, geophysics and geology.

One of the researchers, Andrew Snelling (Ph.D., geology), summarizes the significant outcomes from this project.<sup>19</sup>

1. There is visible physical evidence in rocks (for example, fission tracks and radiohalos) that an enormous amount of radioactive decay occurred in a very short time in earth history, consistent with the age of the earth given in Genesis.
2. There are often systematic differences in the radioisotope age estimates provided by the four main radioactive dating methods used on a single rock sample. This evidence points to different rates of acceleration of decay for these isotopes in the past.
3. There is thus much good evidence that nuclear decay rates were grossly accelerated during a recent catastrophic episode or episodes.
4. There are significant detectable levels of radiocarbon (carbon-14) intrinsic within coal and diamonds, which traditionally are dated to be many millions of years old. The radiocarbon dates of coal and diamonds, however, point to an age consistent with the biblical timescale.

The problem with the radiometric dating methods that give dates of millions of years is the assumptions that the evolutionists use. This RATE research exposes the fallacy of those assumptions, as does much research reported in the conventional scientific literature, which documents that rocks of known age (that is, where humans witnessed the lava coming out of the earth in recent times and recorded the date) often yield grossly errant radioisotope ages (dating rocks to be hundreds of thousands or millions of years old though they are known to be only decades or centuries old). So, how can we trust the dates obtained from rocks of unknown age (where there was no human observer to document when the molten material crystallized into solid rock)?

Dembski dismisses this research as unconvincing. But in consulting the laymen’s summary of the research, (DeYoung 2005; Vardiman et al. 2005) he appears to have only read the last part of the book where the RATE scientists honestly explain the areas of further needed research. In other words, he focuses on the fact that the creationists don’t yet have satisfactory scientific answers to such questions as *why*, *how* and precisely *when* the radioactive decay rates

<sup>16</sup> The first five days of creation are anarthrous and only days 6 and 7 have the article. So the NASB and RSV are literal translations when they read one day, a second day, a third day, etc. But the use of the cardinal number “one” for the first day and the ordinal numbering for the next four days makes those English translations (for example, KJV, NKJV, NIV, ESV, HCSB, NLT) valid which describe each day as definite with the form “the Xth day.” The Hebrew article on day 6 and 7 is probably due to those days being very special with man being created on day 6 (the last creation day) and God ceasing His creative activity on day 7 (the sanctified day of rest). The cardinal number on the first day is significant in that it is defining what one day is: a single cycle of darkness and light, that is, a normal day just like our 24-hour days in the present.

<sup>17</sup> KJV, NKJV, and NIV.

<sup>18</sup> NASB, ESV, HCSB, RSV, NRSV, and NET Bible.

<sup>19</sup> For further explanation of these points see Snelling (2007a). This article contains links to many other articles for laymen and many technical articles, which explain and corroborate the RATE research.



were accelerated. But he appears to have not grasped the strong scientific evidence discovered by the RATE researchers *that* the rates were greatly accelerated at some time in the past. This very strategic research by very competent Bible-believing scientists (with earned PhDs from respected secular universities) should not be so quickly dismissed. Since radiometric dating methods are presented by the scientific establishment to the public as irrefutable proof of millions of years, Christian scholars and laymen urgently need to consult the laymen's summary of this research or the technical book (Vardiman, Snelling, and Chaffin 2005).

### **On his reading of young-earth creationist literature**

Closely related to this previous point is another weakness in Dembski's paper. Judging from the text and footnotes of his paper, he appears to have read a considerable amount of theologically liberal literature on the subject as well as many theological and scientific writings by progressive (old-earth) creationists and theistic evolutionists. In contrast, judging from his arguments and cited sources his reading of recent young-earth creationist literature seems quite limited, and not very careful, especially in regard to the scientific arguments which so influence Dembski's thinking about the age of the creation.<sup>20</sup>

Besides apparently not reading carefully the laymen's summary of the RATE research, he refers to Henry Morris' 1974 book, *Scientific Creationism* (which Dembski did not comment on very accurately). He also refers to a chapter (in a 3-views book) by young-earth creationist authors (Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds) who are not part of mainstream young-earth creationism (but rather part of the Intelligent Design movement) and who say that the majority of scientific evidence is against their young-earth beliefs (Nelson and Reynolds 1999, pp.39–75.) But Nelson and Reynolds' concession to old-earth scientific claims does not represent the views of most young-earth

creationists and certainly not of the leading scientists in the movement. Furthermore, Nelson has degrees in biology and philosophy while Reynolds has degrees in philosophy. So they are not well qualified to present the scientific arguments for a young earth and young cosmos. The chapter in one other 3-views book on creation that Dembski cites (Hagopian 2001) presents essentially no defense of the scientific case for young-earth creationism, because the two creationists are theologians, not scientists, and the book was largely a discussion of some of the biblical/theological issues.

Another example of less than careful reading by Dembski is in footnote 46 on page 22. Dembski refers to "Kurt Wise's view of catastrophic plate tectonics" (Wise 2002, p.193). It is misleading to call this creationist Catastrophic Plate Tectonics model "Wise's view" since it was developed by the respected creationist geophysicist Dr. John Baumgardner (as Wise's book indicates on the page that Dembski cites).<sup>21</sup> Dembski objects that "Wise has yet to account for how such acceleration of ordinary plate tectonic movement" could happen without the destructive effects of the generated heat. Since Baumgardner has produced a considerable amount of published research and complex computer modeling of his theory, he (not Wise) is an expert on this question and in email correspondence with me in early November 2007 he explained that this is no problem at all (see footnote<sup>22</sup> for his response).

Dembski and other old-earth proponents inside and outside the ID movement need to seriously consider the scientific arguments for a young earth and young-universe in the leading creationist literature and DVDs (Austin 1994; Austin et al. 1996; Austin n.d.; Lisle 2006; Morris 2007; Snelling 2007b; Snelling in press; Woodmorappe 1996; Woodmorappe 1999a; Woodmorappe 1999b).

### **On his faulty or inconsistent handling of Scripture**

As we have seen, Dembski appears to take the account of the Fall as literal history. It is difficult to see, therefore, why he does not pay closer attention to

<sup>20</sup> This also seems to be the case in his books on the issue of origins. Dembski (1999) cites no young-earth creationist literature but instead relies on secondary sources (primarily Numbers 1993—Numbers is an agnostic historian of science).

<sup>21</sup> See various technical and laymen articles on this theory, many written by Baumgardner, at [www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/tectonics.asp](http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/faq/tectonics.asp) and at Baumgardner's web site: [www.globalflood.org/platetec/about.html](http://www.globalflood.org/platetec/about.html). With a PhD in geophysics from the University of California, Los Angeles, Baumgardner did much of his research on this model while he was a research scientist in the Theoretical Division of the U. S. government's Los Alamos National Laboratory. While there he also worked on a global ocean model for investigating climate change. For many years he was also an adjunct professor at the Institute for Creation Research. He now is continuing his research with Logos Research Associates.

<sup>22</sup> Baumgardner's personal email to me (3 November 2007, used with permission) explained what happens in his model when there is "runaway subduction" of the ocean crust under the edges of the continental crust. He wrote:

The key to runaway phenomenon is the tendency, documented by many laboratory experiments, for silicate minerals to weaken dramatically under conditions of increasing shear stress. I point out that these experiments show that silicate material (that is, what rocks are made of) can weaken by factors of a billion or more at the levels of shear stress that can occur in a planet the size of the earth. In regard to the heating that occurs, the crucial point is that the amount of heat generated when a rock body deforms is directly proportional to its strength. If the strength is lowered by a factor of a billion, the amount of heat generated for a given amount of deformation likewise is lowered by that factor of a billion. This is the crucial point relevant to the issue you are concerned about. The mathematical formulation I used in the 2D calculations included the deformational heating in a full and rigorous way. Despite the huge amount of deformation that occurs in the calculation, the amount of deformational heating is modest and hence little or no melting occurs. Therefore there is no vast quantity of frictional or deformational heat to dispose of because the amount of mechanical energy that is converted to heat is relatively small.

the text and take the days of creation, the genealogies and the Flood as literal history also. He speaks of the “clear teaching of Scripture” in Romans (without reference to any specific verses) that humanity does not possess the power to heal the rift with God caused by sin (p.29). But why not take the clear teaching of Scripture regarding the herbivorous life-style of pre-Fall animals and birds and the physical consequences of the Fall that are clearly described as temporally *following* the Fall (rather than preceding it)?

To defend his rejection of young-earth creationism, Dembski relies on Charles Hodge (p.24), Francis Schaeffer (p.11) and Augustine (pp.22–23, 41). But in the cited books by Hodge (1997)<sup>23</sup> and Schaeffer (1972) we find no exegetical arguments to defend their rejection of or hesitancy about the literal days of creation or to defend their insistence that the age of the earth is not important. Augustine tried to understand the days of creation exegetically but was hampered by his complete lack of knowledge of Hebrew or Greek<sup>24</sup> and was misled by his faulty Old Latin translation.<sup>25</sup> It is not sufficient to cite great Christian leaders of the past or present. Instead we must examine their exegetical arguments (if any are presented) to see if those leaders support their claims biblically.

Dembski attempts to dissolve the young-earth creationist argument for literal days from Exodus 20:8–11, by using this line of reason (pp.40–41),

Young-earth creationists sometimes insist that the author of Exodus, in listing the Ten Commandments, could only be justified in connecting sabbath observance to the days of creation if the days of creation were successive 24-hour chronological days (see Exodus 20:11 where sabbath observance is justified in terms of God’s creation of the world in six days and then resting on the seventh). But if the days of creation are kairological, referring to basic divisions in the divine order of creation, then Sabbath observance reflects a fundamental truth about the creation of the world.

Dembski does not deal with the actual text of Exodus 20:8–11 or young-earth arguments from it. But this text resists all attempts to add millions of years anywhere in Genesis 1 because it says that God created everything in six days. The day-age view is ruled out because day (*yom*) is used in both parts

of the commandment. The days of the Jewish work-week are the same as the creation days. God could have used several other Hebrew or Aramaic words, if he meant to say “work six days because I created in six long, indefinite periods” (Stambaugh 1991b). But He didn’t. He used the only Hebrew word that means a literal day.

Exodus 20:8–11 also rule out the gap theory or any attempt to put the millions of years before Genesis 1:1 because God says He created the heavens, the earth, the sea, and *all* that is in them during the six days. He did not make anything before the six days. Revelation 21:1 further confirms this, for it says that our present creation is “the first heaven and the first earth.” There was no previous heaven or earth prior to six days of creation in Genesis 1. God created in *chronos* time, not outside it, and Adam (with Eve) was created on the sixth day of *chronos*, for “all the days” of Adam’s life equalled 930 years (Genesis 5:5). But, in Dembski’s view the days of creation in Genesis 1 are kairological, not chronological (as all days after Creation Week are). So, are we really to believe, as Dembski asserts, that the first day of Adam’s life was kairological while the rest of his days were not kairological but rather chronological? What basis is there in the text to justify this division of the days of Adam’s life?

On page 43, Dembski says that “The key question that now needs to be addressed is how to position the Fall within this kairological view of creation. In answering this question, we need to bear in mind that Genesis 1 describes God’s *original* design plan for creation.” But Genesis 1 doesn’t merely describe God’s original plan. Attention to the text shows that it also describes the original *actual state* of the creation. The repetitive use of “God saw that it was good” and “it was so,” culminating in the declaration of “very good,” emphatically shows this. And if millions of years of natural evil reflects God’s original design plan, then I fail to see how Dembski can say a couple of sentences later that “The Fall represents the entrance of evil into the world, and evil is always parasitic, never creative.” How could it enter, if it already was there, and how could natural evil be in the creative period but never be creative?

Another example of problematic reasoning (or lack

<sup>23</sup> Hodge (1997). Incredibly, in his chapter on creation (vol. 1, pp.550–574), the only verses in Genesis that Hodge alludes to or quotes are 1:2, 1:3, 1:14, 1:27, 2:4, 2:7. But he gives no sustained discussion of any of them. Genesis and geology are discussed in vol. 1, pp.570–574 and Hodge favors the day-age view over the gap theory (a view he previously held before 1860) for harmonizing old-earth geology with the Bible. Equally incredible is the fact that, when Hodge deals with the origin and antiquity of man (vol. 2, pp.1–41), he discusses only two short Bible passages (Genesis 1:26–27 and Genesis 2:7), and he does that only in the opening paragraph of the chapter!

<sup>24</sup> He only learned a modest amount of Greek at the end of his life, but this was after he had written his commentaries on Genesis and City of God, where he discusses the days of creation. (See Augustine 1982).

<sup>25</sup> All of Augustine’s work on Genesis was based on the Old Latin Version, which was a translation of the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text, and was inferior in accuracy to Jerome’s later Latin Vulgate. Augustine was particularly misled by the Old Latin translation of *beyom* in Genesis 2:4. Modern translations read, “in the day that (or, when) God made the heaven and the earth.” In contrast, the Old Latin reads, “When day was made, God made heaven and earth.” So Augustine thought God made everything in one day or in an instant. (See Lavalley 1989).

thereof) from Scripture relates to the interpretation of Genesis 4–11. Dembski contends that “a face-value chronological reading of these chapters” is “difficult to square” with “archeological and anthropological evidence.” He cites four examples (pp. 48–49).

1. Dating the Flood 1,600 years after creation and roughly at 2400BC is a problem for him but he doesn't explain why.
2. He says the ark was too small and there are too many obstacles to believing that Noah and the animals could really survive for a year. Too small? He shows no evidence of having ever done the calculations to show this. This and the other obstacles he mentions (adequate food, drinking water and sunlight) and many other supposed problems that other skeptics of the Flood account raise are solved by John Woodmorappe in his thoroughly researched book: *Noah's Ark: A Feasibility Study*. Without invoking any miracles or any technologies that would not be reasonable to assume that Noah had at his disposal, Woodmorappe shows that the account the global Flood and Ark is very believable (Lovett, Morris and Ham 2007; Woodmorappe 1996).
3. Dembski asserts that Noah's family couldn't produce today's population and whole civilizations a mere 400 years after the Flood. Again, no details are given to justify this claim. Perhaps he is inclined to accept the Egyptian and other ancient chronologies over the Bible's teaching, for he does refer to exhibits at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago. But the present size and growth rate of human population fits the biblical record (Morris and Whitcomb 1961, pp. 396–398; White, 2006). Solidly reliable written history only goes back to about the time of the Flood. And scholarly research is increasingly demonstrating the reliability of the biblical chronology as over against the Egyptian scheme (Ashton and Down 2006; Jones 2005).
4. He thinks it is unbelievable that Abraham was born within 200 years of the Tower of Babel incident, but again gives no specific reasons why. In conclusion (p. 49) he says that Dating methods, in my view, provide strong evidence for rejecting this face-value chronological reading of Genesis 4–11. Nonetheless, what's decisive for me in rejecting this reading is the damage it does, in my view, to the Christian apologetic enterprise.

So, for Dembski, archeological dating methods take

precedence over the sound exegesis of Scripture. Actually, it is the acceptance of the secular interpretation of the evidence of radioactive decay that is destructive to the apologetic enterprise, because in that case, there really is nothing to defend.

Dembski asks how then we are to interpret Genesis 4–11. His reply (p. 49) is,

Suffice it to say, however, that Noah's flood will need to be interpreted as a local event. That this may be less of a problem exegetically than it might seem at first blush, consider that Scriptural claims to universality are often hyperbolic or eschatological and thus not fully realized in the present. For instance, Paul in Romans 10:18 describes “their sound” (i.e., the preaching of the Gospel) as having gone “into all the earth and their words unto the ends of the world.” Notwithstanding, the preaching of the Gospel at the time did not extend much beyond the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East.

But he presents no evidence to support this bald assertion, and attention to the biblical text is again lacking. Acts 8 records the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, before even the first Gentile. Ethiopia is hardly part of the Mediterranean basin and it is extremely doubtful that this eunuch never shared his faith with anyone else in Ethiopia and that neither he nor his converts ever traveled anywhere else with the gospel in the first century in sub-Saharan Africa. Paul greets Pudens and Claudia in 2 Timothy 4:21 and there is historical evidence that they helped take the gospel to Wales in the first century.<sup>26</sup> Well documented history shows that the gospel had gone to England in AD 58.<sup>27</sup> In Romans 15:28 Paul says he was planning to go to Spain and there is no reason to think that the other apostles never went to the rest of the world, given the command of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20 and the silence of the New Testament about the other apostles' gospel activities. In fact, reliable tradition tells us that the apostle Thomas took the gospel all the way to southern India and the apostle Andrew took it to the Russian lands.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, while Scripture sometimes does use universal terms hyperbolically, very often, if not usually, it is a literal universality that is intended, as, for example, in Matthew 28:18 (all authority is given to Jesus) and Romans 3:23 (all have sinned). In Genesis 6–9 universal terms and phrases<sup>29</sup> are used over 60 times, which surely is for emphasis, not exaggeration.

<sup>26</sup> See Carroll (1931, p. 44) for a brief discussion of Pudens and Claudia.

<sup>27</sup> In his thoroughly researched book, Dr. Bill Cooper documents that Bran, father of the British king Caratacus, was under house arrest in Caesar's household in Rome from AD 51–58. During that time Bran was converted to Christ and historical records say that when he returned to England in AD 58, he brought the Christian faith to the British people (Cooper 1995, pp. 247–250).

<sup>28</sup> I know a Russian pastor in Moscow who has informed me that there is a strong Russian Orthodox tradition about Andrew's efforts to take the gospel to the Slavic peoples even as far north as Kiev (the capital of modern day Ukraine). Regarding the strong tradition about Thomas's mission work in India, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_the\\_Apostle#Thomas\\_and\\_India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_the_Apostle#Thomas_and_India).

<sup>29</sup> For example, all, every, everything, under heaven, in whose nostrils is the breath of life.

Dembski intimates that a future essay will defend his local Flood view. It is hoped that he will not avoid interacting with the 88 pages of biblical arguments for a global Flood in Morris and Whitcomb's *The Genesis Flood*. Dembski's local Flood view highlights another problem with his theodicy. Acceptance of millions of years of natural evil before man was created logically requires one to reject the global Flood (Mortenson 2006b).

One more exegetical problem to note. Dembski is not being consistent in taking some future consequences of the Fall as having already occurred in the past, while taking other of those consequences of Genesis 3 as happening chronologically after Adam sinned. I am not denying that Dembski thinks some of the curses in Genesis 3 did actually come after the Fall. I believe he does think this. But I contend that he is being inconsistent to believe that some curses in Genesis 3 were actuated in the future after the Fall and some were actuated in the past before the Fall (as God worked preemptively). The grammar of Genesis 3 indicates that they all were future consequences of the Fall.

So, on Dembski's view, animal death, disease and extinction plus thorns and thistles existed for millions of years before Adam sinned (and even before he was created) by the preemptive work of God. But if this is so, then given the future tense verbs in Genesis 3, the following also must be accepted as true events in actual time-space history (and not merely as foreknowledge thoughts in the mind of the eternal God) before Adam was created. In other words, if Dembski's view is correct, then the following events, which Genesis says occurred as a result of Adam's sin, also would have *actually* occurred in history before he sinned. To be sure, Dembski does not say these events actually did occur before the Fall, but he gives no basis by which we could say that some natural (and all moral) evils actually occurred after Adam sinned but that most natural evils occurred preemptively in time before Adam's Fall. So, following his argument, we would have to conclude these events actually occurred before the Fall.

1. The serpent and the animals were already cursed before the serpent tempted Eve.
2. The serpent had already been crawling on his belly and eating dust before he tempted Eve.
3. The seed of the woman had already been born and already had been bruised on the heel by the serpent and he had already bruised the serpent on the head.
4. Eve already had greatly multiplied pain in childbirth before she ate the fruit and so already had at least one child before the temptation—a child that is never mentioned in Scripture.
5. The ground had already been cursed with thorns and thistles for at least 300 million years (according

to the evolutionary dating methods which Dembski accepts as reliable).

6. The marriage relationship of Adam and Eve had already been characterized by Eve's desire to control Adam and Adam's domination over Eve.
7. Adam was already physically dying before he ate from the tree, in which case Paul was utterly mistaken in Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21–22 when he said that death came into the human race through and after Adam's sin.
8. Adam and Eve already knew (before Eve was tempted and they ate the forbidden fruit) that they were naked and were ashamed of the fact and hid from God (for some reason other than disobedience to God). And this would be the case even though Genesis 2:25 says that they were not ashamed of their nakedness before the Fall. In this case also, Adam's rationalization of his disobedience misrepresents reality (Genesis 3:11–12).
9. The causal clauses "because you have done this" (Genesis 3:14) and "because you have listened to the voice of your wife" (Genesis 3:17) become truly meaningless.

Using Dembski's way of reasoning about history, the events in points 1–8 should be understood to have happened preemptively *before* Adam and Eve sinned and in a creation which God declared six times was "good" and which at the end of the creation period He described as "very good." In this case, Genesis 3 becomes meaningless and all our Bible translators have mistranslated the Hebrew verbs with future tense verbs in Genesis 2:17 and 3:14–19. Is this really possible?

Given Dembski's serious lack of sound exegesis, I would urge him and his readers to carefully work through the thorough arguments of the theological trained authors in Mortenson and Ury (2008).

### **On his erroneous or misleading reasoning**

One example of Dembski's erroneous reasoning is on page 40. He says the kairological days of creation "are neither exact 24-hour days (as in young-earth creationism) nor epochs in natural history (as in old-earth creationism) nor even a literary device (as in the literary-framework theory)." But in footnote 43 on page 20 he says that in their framework hypothesis, Irons and Kline

essentially reinvent the *chronos-kairos* distinction, distinguishing a "lower-register" cosmology, which is the realm of the visible, from an "upper-register" cosmology, which is the realm of the invisible."

I find it hard to see any substantive difference between Dembski's view and the Irons/Kline position.

On page 41 he says that "A kairological interpretation of the six days of creation is unashamedly anthropocentric." But how can that be, when he previously told us that *kairos* means God's

time and a top-down view of history? Wouldn't that make it unashamedly theocentric, especially since God features prominently in Genesis 1 and man is only mentioned on the sixth day?

As another example, Dembski repeatedly says something like this: "God acts preemptively to anticipate the Fall by allowing natural evils to rage prior to it" (p. 42). Perhaps Dembski has made a bad choice of words here.<sup>30</sup> Consulting two dictionaries, one from the late twentieth century and the other from the early nineteenth century, I found that in the context of war "preemptive" means to reduce an enemy's attacking strength before the enemy can use it. Or in the context of the card game of "bridge" it means to make a high bid to shut out opposition bidding. Or in a business transaction it means to buy something beforehand so as to prevent someone else from buying the same thing. So, to act preemptively is to act in such a way that you prevent the other party from acting in the way they would have, if the preemptive step was not taken. So, America attacked Iraq preemptively to prevent Iraq from using its supposed weapons of mass destruction. But in Scripture God made no preemptive act to prevent man from sinning and if the millions of years of natural evil were intended to be preemptive, they utterly failed.

Furthermore, there is the problem of the lack of biblical precedence for such a pre-sin judgment of God. Dembski offers no example in Scripture when God judged the domain or possessions of a man or nation *before* the person or nation sinned. I cannot think of any biblical example. Also, it would be grossly unjust (and therefore completely out of character) for God to execute judgment before the crime was committed.

On pages 43–44, Dembski says that God "brings about natural evils . . . , letting them run their course *prior to* the Fall" (his emphasis). But then he says that

A kairological reading of Genesis preserves the young-earth creationist emphasis on tracing all evil in the world to human sin: God creates a perfect world, God places humans in that world, they sin, and the world goes haywire.

How can millions of years of animal death and extinction, earthquakes, tsunamis, asteroid impacts, etc., be called a "perfect" world and what was left to go haywire after the Fall? To help us understand this he says that

we need to take seriously that the drama of the Fall takes place in a *segregated area*. Genesis 2:8 refers to this area as a garden planted by God (i.e., the

Garden of Eden). Now, ask yourself why God would need to plant a garden in a perfect world untouched by natural evil. In a perfect world, wouldn't the whole world be a garden? And why, once humans sin, do they have to be expelled from this garden and live outside it where natural evil is present? . . . If we accept that God acts preemptively to anticipate the Fall, then in the chronology leading up to the Fall, the world has already experienced, in the form of natural evil, the consequences of human sin." (his emphasis)

There seems here to be both bad reasoning and a failure to pay attention to the text. Genesis 2 makes clear why in a perfect world God made a garden. It was to be both a place of responsibility (tending the garden) and testing (don't eat from one of the trees). Genesis 3 tells us they were expelled from the garden so that they would not have access to the tree of life. The world they were expelled to was originally perfect but by the time they stepped into it after the Fall, it had been cursed and had become a constant reminder (through thorns, sweaty work, painful child-bearing, dangerous cursed animals, etc.) of the gravity of their rebellious act. Finally, how can there be chronology leading up the Fall in a kairological creation week?

On page 46 he writes,

How did the first humans gain entry to the Garden? There are two basic options: progressive creation and evolving creation. In the first, God creates the first humans in the Garden. In the second, the first humans evolve from primate ancestors outside the Garden and then are brought into the Garden.

Whether any progressive creationist believes the same as Dembski describes their position here or not, I do not know. But Dembski has left out a third possible answer to the posed question, which is the answer clearly taught in Genesis 2:7–8. That is, God made the man supernaturally from dust (not from primate ancestors within an evolutionary process) before He made the Garden and then placed man in it. Then He made the woman from man after he was in the Garden.

On page 48 he contends that

the theodicy developed here is compatible with an old Earth and a recent humanity (i.e., a kairological reading of Genesis 1–3 and a chronological reading of Genesis 4–11).

But he gives no hermeneutical or exegetical basis for these two different readings. The *waw*-consecutive verbs used throughout Genesis 1–11 and other literary indicators show this is all one continuous historical account.<sup>31</sup> Adam and Eve are in both parts of Genesis.

<sup>30</sup> This is rather surprising, however, since the paper under view is his 2.3 version (17 March, 2007). The language was also in the 2.1 version (August 2006) that I originally examined.

<sup>31</sup> On the historical unity of Genesis 1–11, see Kaiser 2001, pp. 53–83. For a more detailed defense of Genesis 1 as historical narrative, see Boyd 2008 pp. 163–192. This work demonstrates beyond question that Genesis 1 is historical narrative, not poetry. Boyd's technical essay on which this book chapter is based is Boyd 2005, pp. 631–734. A layman's summary of Boyd's research is in DeYoung 2005, pp. 157–172.

Were some of the days of their lives kairological (God's time) and other days chronological (man's time)?

I will mention here one final example of erroneous reasoning. On page 51 Dembski leaves me scratching my head to follow the logic.

Speculations about worlds that never were are interesting as far as they go. But they must not distract us from the world we actually inhabit. That world is a dynamic, messy world filled with tragedy, comedy, romance, bitterness, and adventure. There never was any other world. In the mind of God, Creation always presupposed the Cross, humans always sinned, and divine preemption was always necessary to deal with human sin. To be sure, in the act of creation, as it follows the teleological-semantic logic by which God gives being to the world and organizes it, not chronologically but kairologically, evil is always logically downstream. In that logic, God creates a good world, it becomes even better once humans are created, and then it goes haywire once humans sin. Seen chronologically, however, the world has always been haywire. Hence the need for a new heaven and earth.

In the mind of God humans always sinned, even before Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit? There never was a world that was not messy, tragic and bitter? Evil is always logically downstream, but the millions of years of death were before the Fall in God's "good world," which then went haywire once man sinned, but really was always haywire? Such confusing reasoning seems to me to make the Bible absolutely incomprehensible.

### ***The impulse behind Dembski's theodicy***

Dembski says that "the impulse behind the present theodicy is to render our understanding of Genesis credible to the current noetic environment" (p.48). But should a Christian scholar, or any other Christian, ever be motivated by an impulse to be credible to the current secular thinking of our culture? Surely we must present our Christian beliefs with the most compellingly reasonable arguments we can. But in the process we must confront the world's erroneous thinking.

Paul says we are not to be conformed to the thinking of this world but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:1–2). He teaches us that those who reject the Creator (which includes most of the leading scientists)<sup>32</sup> have foolish, futile and darkened minds (Romans 1:18–20 and Ephesians 4:17–18). He tells us that we are in a great war against speculations and imaginations, lofty ideas raised up against the

knowledge of God and therefore against His Word (2 Corinthians 10:3–5). He warns us not to be led astray by "knowledge falsely so called" (1 Timothy 6:20–21) or taken captive by "philosophy, empty deception and the traditions of men" (Colossians 2:8). The goal of the Christian should be to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5), to examine everything carefully (1 Thessalonians 5:21) and to test every truth claim (in science or any other human endeavor) against the truth of God's Word (Acts 17:11).

Our responsibility before God is to proclaim and defend the truth of Scripture in our culture with conviction and grace but without compromise, whether it seems credible to the intellectuals of our day or not. So, Dembski's impulse for this theodicy seems to me to be amiss. In another place Dembski says that he is proposing his theodicy

to impress on us the gravity of sin and, most significantly, to bring us to our senses and thereby to restore our sanity. ... sin has rendered us insane. Granted, most of us don't see it that way and take offense at the very suggestion. But if God is all that Christian theology teaches that he is, then it is nothing short of insanity for us to be constantly constructing idols that divert us from finding ultimate satisfaction in the God..." (p.32).

But the young-earth creationist view of the Fall and natural evil shows no less clearly the gravity and "insanity" of sin. Furthermore, the almighty Creator God of truth has told us in His Word in clear language that He created in six literal days about 6,000 years ago and destroyed the world with a global catastrophic Flood at the time of Noah. He has also clearly told us that man and animals were originally vegetarian but that after Adam sinned the whole creation was cursed and put in bondage to corruption. Therefore, since God has so clearly spoken, it is nothing short of "insanity" for us to doubt His Word and instead believe the fallible interpretations of that *cursed* creation by godless "insane" men with darkened minds who have invented the old-earth and old-universe theories based on unscientific, philosophical, anti-biblical assumptions! The secular world and most of the Christian world today takes offense at that statement, I am sure, but it is still true. It is "insanity" to trust the words of sinful men and reject the words of Almighty God.

### **Conclusion**

Dembski has provided us with sound reasons for rejecting liberal views of the Fall and other old-earth

<sup>32</sup> In 1998 a 2-question, anonymous survey was conducted of 517 of the 1800 members of the American National Academy of Sciences. These 517 scientists of America's most prestigious scientific organization were in the sections of biology, geology, astronomy and physics. The survey found that of the 50% who responded to the survey 72% were overt atheists, 21% were agnostics and only 7% believed in the existence of a personal Creator God. It is most likely that the 50% who did not respond were unbelievers, since believers would surely want to register their existence in this highest scientific body in America (Larson and Witham 1998, p.313).

theodicies proposed by professing evangelicals. For that we can be thankful.

Although there are many other weaknesses with the argumentation for Dembski's proposed theodicy, the ones discussed here require me to reject his theodicy also and stick with the traditional, orthodox Christian understanding of 1) the Fall and its consequences and 2) the age of the earth.

There is only one reason that Dembski has come up with this very mistaken theodicy. He provides no really defensible logical or exegetical reasons for it. The fundamental reason is, as he clearly states, that he has accepted as proven fact the claims of evolutionary geologists and cosmologists about millions of years and the claims of unbelieving archeologists and anthropologists about ancient Near-Eastern history. But those claims are *interpretations* of observations based on anti-biblical *assumptions*. Dembski, however, uses these "facts" to reinterpret or reject the plain teaching of God's Word and to redefine terms.

Dembski says

A young earth seems to be required to maintain a traditional understanding of the Fall. And yet a young earth clashes sharply with mainstream science. Christians therefore seem to be in a position of having to choose their poison. They can go with a young earth, thereby maintaining theological orthodoxy but committing scientific heresy; or they can go with an old earth, thereby committing theological heresy but maintaining scientific orthodoxy (p. 25).

Clearly, he has chosen the side of "scientific orthodoxy" (even though the leaders of the scientific establishment are very fallible and the vast majority of them are hostile to biblical Christianity). And he has chosen not to take the side of historic orthodox theology, which is based on the sound exegesis of the inspired, inerrant Word of the infallible Creator.

But Dembski has done so with little evidence of really understanding (or even reading carefully) the RATE research done by eight Ph.D. creation scientists. And he has accepted what the evolutionary scientific establishment dogmatically claims about the age and history of the creation, even though he apparently rejects what that same establishment claims about the origin and diversification of life.<sup>33</sup> But if someone, especially a non-scientist, doesn't accept

what the majority of scientists say about biological evolution, why should he trust what the majority of scientists say about the age of the creation? To do so is inconsistent. Also, as a philosopher, Dembski fails to see or deal with the naturalistic uniformitarian philosophy which dominates geology and astronomy and which is the real source of the idea of millions of years.<sup>34</sup>

As I show in *The Great Turning Point* (Mortenson 2004b), the idea of millions of years developed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries out of anti-biblical assumptions used to interpret the geological evidence. Most of the church was deceived by philosophy masquerading as scientific fact, in part because Christians failed to take seriously the compelling arguments of the young-earth creationists of that time, called the Scriptural geologists.<sup>35</sup>

So, ultimately what is at stake here is the authority of Scripture. Dembski's flawed theodicy is the result of placing the claims of the largely godless scientific majority above the authority of the Word of God. So, how are truth-claims to be tested? Whose word do we really believe? God's or fallible sinful man's? Will we be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 and test everything against Scripture? Is God's Word really the final authority for us or not? That is the issue.

In effect and apparently contrary to his intentions, Dembski has given us much evidence to show that it is simply impossible to accept the millions of years and accept what the Bible says about death and natural evil. Only the young-earth creationist view fully embraces the Bible's teaching about the origin (and future) of natural (and moral) evil and provides a sound theodicy—an adequate and persuasive answer to the skeptics who contend that the existence of natural evil rules out the existence of a good, loving and omnipotent Creator. Furthermore, modern scientific research (both by evolutionists and young-earth creationists) is increasingly confirming the literal historical truth of God's Word regarding origins (just as the evidence confirmed Genesis in the early nineteenth century when the millions-of-years idea was developed).

I appeal to Dembski, and all other Christians who are inclined to accept the millions of years of natural evil as fact, to become informed on the creationist

<sup>33</sup> He apparently rejects that humans have evolved from ape-like creatures, though one could interpret him to reject only an atheistic evolutionary view (where no intelligent designer was guiding the process). But in his recent paper on the subject (Dembski 2005), he never once refers to Genesis, where he would find plenty of Scriptural evidence that Adam was created supernaturally from the dust of the earth (not from a pre-existing living creature) and Eve was created supernaturally from Adam's rib (not naturally from any other creature).

<sup>34</sup> To my knowledge, he has not interacted publicly with my article (Mortenson 2004a) which I sent to him by email on 3 March 2005 and which he acknowledged reading (or at least skimming) at the time. He has not responded privately either.

<sup>35</sup> See Mortenson (2004b), which is a shortened form of my Ph.D. thesis. It describes the "Genesis-geology debate" of the earth nineteenth century (as historians of science often call it), discusses in depth the writings of seven of the key Scriptural geologists, and presents much evidence for concluding that the Genesis-geology debate was not science vs religion (as historians of science usually frame it) but rather a worldview conflict (atheism and deism vs biblical christianity). For those lacking time or interest to read the book, see Mortenson (2003) which covers the key points in the book.

geological arguments for a global Flood and a young earth, especially the arguments relating to radiometric dating methods.<sup>36</sup> The earth and the cosmos are increasingly yielding their evidence that our Creator has given us the literal truth about history, beginning with Genesis 1:1. As we stand on the authority of God's Word, we will always find sooner or later that true scientific knowledge confirms His Word.

### Postscript

An additional excellent critique of Dembski's theodicy (as expressed in his book) is by Thomas Nettles, Professor of Historical Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Nettles 2009). Shortly after his book review was published, David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology and Professor of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary where Dembski teaches, wrote a critique of Nettles's book review (Allen 2010). Nettles then responded to Allen (Nettles 2010) with a foreword by another Southern Baptist leader.

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<sup>36</sup> See at least Morris (2007), which includes a DVD with PowerPoint slides for teaching the subject and has a well-illustrated chapter on radiometric dating that is understandable by non-specialists, plus my article on philosophical naturalism (Mortenson 2004), and DeYoung 2005.



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