

A Logical and Desirable Synthesis of Science and Theology Through Reinterpretation of the Bible and Scientific Theory

In 1857, Philip Henry Gosse fashioned a new model of synthesis that attempted to integrate Christian theology with scientific discoveries in an effort to reconcile the differences between these two illustrations of creation. Gosse claimed that God had planted misleading evidence of the earth's age when he created it. The public largely rejected Gosse's synthesis; his book on the subject, *Omphalos*, sold poorly and was widely criticized ("Philip Henry Gosse"). The idea of a devious God was distasteful to the religious community and his assertion of false implanted evidence derided the purpose of many scientific circles. Consequently, Gosse's hypothesis, while logical, was shunned because it was an undesirable synthesis that proved unfavorable to religion as well as to science. However, the potential for an appealing fusion of these two seemingly conflicting sides that does not insult the principles of both science and religion is still possible through the careful reinterpretation of Scripture and of scientific discovery.

In order to construct such a synthesis as the one described above, it is necessary to pinpoint exactly where Gosse failed in his synthetic attempt. The Gosse hypothesis was undeniably logical. However, Gosse's synthesis claimed that God had planted false evidence during the Creation in order to deliberately mislead the people into thinking that the earth's age was older than it appeared to be in the Bible. This aspect of his hypothesis obviously angered many devout Christians. How could God intentionally deceive mankind in such a manner? The notion of a 'trickster God' seemed antithetical to the image of God as an all-powerful, omnipotent being. The latter image of God projects a wizened figure of immense power while

the former description illustrates a God that is a mischievous prankster. It is understandable why many theologians might find this image of a trickster God as heretical. Furthermore, the assertion that all of the evidence of the earth's mature existence was falsified is a direct jab at the reliability of data that many scientists use to reach conclusions about the age of the earth. By nullifying the accuracy of such proofs as dinosaur fossils and tree rings, Gosse essentially invalidated not just what appear to be facts and evidence of the earth's old age, but also the tools with which science constructs observations and hypotheses. This insult to scientific research and inquiry resulted in the dismissal of Gosse's claim by many scientific circles. But perhaps the most important rejection of Gosse's synthesis was by that of the general public. The abysmal sale of his book *Omphalos* illustrates the poor reception that his model of creation received ("Phillip Henry Gosse"). It is likely that this rejection of Gosse's synthesis was largely due to what is now called the omphalos hypothesis. The hypothesis states that, given that Gosse's claim of creation is true, the earth could have very well been created five minutes ago with all of man's memories being created along with it by God. This hypothesis is logically congruent with Gosse's synthesis and is likely to be a major reason for the poor reception his book *Omphalos* received by the general public. The concept that God could have fabricated our very memories was probably too heinous a notion for the public to accept. This hypothesis would verily quash our individual histories – an aspect of ourselves that makes us who we are. Due to these reasons, specific communities such as scientists and theologians were repelled by Gosse's synthesis as well as a large part of the general public. His claim was logical but it was the undesirability of such a claim that doomed its popularity and reputation from the outset.

An illustration of a logical and desirable synthesis of science and theology can be evidenced by taking the example of dinosaur fossils as a starting point. For many years and for

many people, the existence of dinosaur fossils is seen as antithetical to the word of God.

However, careful reading of Scripture can integrate the theology of Christianity with scientific evidence of the existence of dinosaurs. If God created all the earth and all the animals in it, then he must have created dinosaurs along with man. Since we will be working under the assumption that humans and dinosaurs lived together in ancient times, it becomes necessary to mention proof of their coexistence. The Glen Rose formation in Texas is a trail in which dinosaur tracks and human footprints were found together in the same stratum of mud, indicating that these two species once walked the earth at the same time (“Taylor Trail”).

If this is to be believed, then why is it that dinosaurs are not mentioned in the Bible? The word ‘dinosaur’ was coined by Richard Owen in 1842 and is derived from the Greek language; it roughly translates to ‘wondrous reptile.’ So, while it is true that the term ‘dinosaur’ is never seen in the Bible, it is also true that the animals now called dinosaurs seem to be referenced numerous times in Scripture. In the Book of Job 40:15-24, an animal called ‘behemoth’ is described as having a “tail like a cedar” and “bones [that] are like beams of bronze” with “ribs like bars of iron.” This behemoth “[ate] grass like an ox” and was “chief of the ways of God” (Holy Bible). Many believe that these characteristics can be attributed to that of an elephant or hippopotamus. In fact, many study bibles will substitute the word ‘behemoth’ with ‘elephant’ or ‘hippopotamus.’ These assumptions are not illogical since both elephants and hippopotamuses are large and bulky creatures. However, neither of these animals has a tail that is even remotely large enough to be compared to a cedar tree. Furthermore, it is unlikely that either an elephant or hippopotamus would ever be “chief of the ways of God.” That phrase conjures the image of a gigantic creature whose size was virtually unrivaled – such as that of a dinosaur. It is possible that the behemoth mentioned in the Bible is none other than the famous Brachiosaurus, which

left behind the largest complete dinosaur skeleton ever discovered. The behemoth could even be the dinosaur Diplodocus, which rivals the Brachiosaurus for size and is also well renowned for the extraordinary size of its tail. The tail of the Diplodocus, which was estimated to have been about forty-five feet, was so gigantic that it could be justifiably referred to as the size of cedar. Also, in Job 41 and Isaiah 27:1, a beast called the 'leviathan' is described as a scaly, sea-dwelling creature whose "breath kindles coals" with a mouth out of "sparks of fire shoot out" (Holy Bible). Often, the leviathan is viewed as an alligator or a crocodile. However, upon careful examination of the word of Scripture, it is clear that is highly unlikely for the leviathan to be an alligator or a crocodile. Alligators and crocodiles enjoy the water but their primary habitat is on land. Leviathan is described as a "reptile" that is "in the sea." The leviathan made its home in the sea while both alligators and crocodiles have a primary habitat on land. Furthermore, neither alligators nor crocodiles can breathe fire whereas numerous dinosaur fossils have been found with curious chamber extensions of the breathing passages. The function of these chambers has yet to be discovered by scientists but it leaves the possibility open that there were once dinosaurs that could breathe fire (Etinger).

It is clear from such evidence found in Scripture and from scientific discovery that there is great potential for a logical synthesis between science and religion that is appealing and desirable. While some may view the existence of dinosaurs as proof of the fallacy of Scripture, it is clear that an amalgamation of the reinterpreted word of God and scientific discovery is feasible. Gosse chose to put forth a synthesis that alienated most of his readers by deriding both scientific and religious beliefs but a desirable synthesis that meshes these two systems together without deriding their basic principles is very much a logical possibility.

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18

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