

Healing division or courting heresy?

The Fool and the Heretic: How two scientists moved beyond labels to a Christian dialogue about creation and evolution

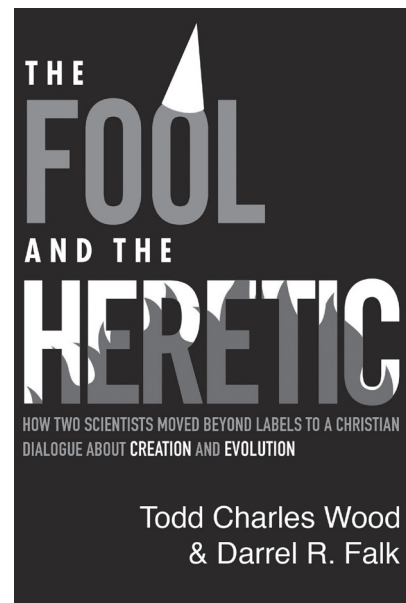
Todd Charles Wood and Darrel R. Falk

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Long on rhetoric and short on science, *The Fool and the Heretic* (F&H) brings together two scientists with (allegedly) diametrically opposite views regarding the evolution-versus-creation controversy. This Christian exchange was intended to progress beyond the invective that can mar such debates. It was organised by Rob Barrett of the Colossian Forum in the interest of Christian ‘unity’, a forum that has its science and education wing funded by The Templeton Foundation,¹ which is committed to teaching theistic evolution.² The Colossian Forum is, therefore, far from impartial in its mediation between the opposing sides. Barrett also wrote the foreword and commentary on the chapters.

As may be inferred from the title, Todd Wood, described in the book as a young-earth creationist (YEC),³ poses as the science-denying ‘fool’ while Darrel Falk, a theistic evolutionist (TE), poses as the Bible-denying ‘heretic’—monikers derived from either side of the debate. Falk is a co-founder of *BioLogos*, a proselytizing ‘Christian advocacy group’ whose sole purpose is to sell evolution to evangelicals—no matter at what cost to biblical inerrancy.⁴ Wood is founder and president of *Core Academy of Science*, an educational and research



organisation teaching science from a YEC perspective. Both men have Ph.D.s in evolutionary biology, with post-doctoral training, so are well matched in their scholarly standing.

What makes F&H a frustrating read is that the authors talk past one another, and Falk is not held accountable for his brazen apologetic for evolution and scientism. Wood, unfortunately true to form, also makes astonishing and unfounded claims in support of evolution, which are challenged in this review. Each chapter ends with questions for group study. However, these are leading questions, subtly designed to encourage scepticism for creationism. The overall format and tone of the book (Falk and Barrett have the last say), ‘stacks the cards’ against the YEC position.

Meeting the enemy

Wood describes his apprehension at the prospect of meeting Falk (to discuss their differences, and why they

believe what they believe) because it was seen almost as a grand experiment, to see what would happen (p. 24). He admits the fearful prospect of meeting a co-founder of *BioLogos*: “If there’s anyone in Christianity who’s my archenemy, it would have to be Darrel. So I have to love him, and I felt I should at least meet this enemy I was supposed to love” (p. 85). Wood relates the first meeting with Falk and, true to type, Falk accused him of not ‘knowing science’, rigidly defined as naturalism. But after Wood reeled off his evolutionary scientific qualifications, Falk had to apologize, recognizing he had hurt Wood’s feelings (p. 89). Falk admits that many in his community have belittled YECs (p. 92), so he was initially doubtful if Wood would really want to meet him.

Todd Wood: there’s vast evidence for evolution!

Wood’s opening salvo in chapter one is greatly concerning, setting his entire case on the back foot. He claims:

“Darrel R Falk is ... right when he says that evolutionary scientists have collected a vast amount of evidence supporting the theory of evolution ... that there’s evidence supporting the evolution of humans from animals over millions of years ... that evolution is an extremely successful theory, accepted almost without question by a huge majority of the world’s scientists” (p. 29).

Wood claims *Australopithecus afarensis* (figure 1) “had knees and hips for walking upright on two legs, like modern people” (p. 155) and considers the small, hyrax-like *Hyracotherium* was the horse ancestor, as per evolutionary theory. Not surprisingly, Falk gleefully states: “Todd is the first to admit that there isn’t enough scientific evidence to support young-earth creationism” (p. 98).

From someone from within the YEC fold, these are worrying words. But statements like these are consistent with Wood’s blog, where he writes

there are “gobs and gobs” of evidence for evolution.⁵ However, when it comes to this evidence, Wood is deeply misinformed. The fossils demonstrate *A. afarensis* was a knuckle-walker and the hips, pelvis, ankle, knee, and inner ear were all orientated for quadrupedal locomotion.⁶ A leading expert on horse evolution, Jens Lorenz Franzen, is far less certain than Wood, stating: “The first chapter in the evolution of the horse—during which all of these developments took place—is missing.”⁷ Wood should have made clear that evidence is interpreted through a commonly held worldview, or paradigm.



Image by: Ephraim33/CC BY 2.5

Figure 1. Skeletal features of *Australopithecus afarensis*, specifically the distal radius, demonstrated knuckle-walking morphology, typical of living apes, chimpanzees, and gorillas.

In academia, methodological naturalism, *a priori*, rules God out at the philosophical level, requiring that naturalistic explanations are the only ones allowable. Thus, to question the paradigm is to commit intellectual and career suicide. But consensus science never makes for good science.⁸ Having been trained in evolutionary biology, it appears that Wood cannot separate himself from that paradigm. He sees evidence for evolution everywhere because that’s the way he has been educated to interpret the evidence. However, he does offer an informed discussion of the inconsistencies of holding evolutionary belief as a Christian—while still holding some of those inconsistencies himself.

Falk: creationists harm the church!

When it comes to YEC beliefs, Falk thinks Wood is “harming the church” by “contributing to the declining influence of the Christian faith on culture” (p. 45). But according to this logic, Jesus also harmed the church, by teaching that God made humans male and female at the beginning of Creation (Mark 10:6) and that Noah’s Flood was an historic, global event (Matthew 24:37–39; Luke 17:26–28). Furthermore, the ‘resurrection from the dead’ or ‘Christ’s miracles’ can be interchanged with ‘YEC’; for in Falk’s argument, these too were historical, supernatural events, non-repeatable, non-observable, thus not subject to scientific scrutiny.

Following Falk’s reasoning, since consensus science cannot accept bodily resurrection and miracles any more than it can accept six-day creation, the latter should also be excised from Christian belief in order to appease scientists. Falk recognizes the dilemma—one raised by liberals over a century ago—but offers no viable solution, blindly denying that evangelicalism could go the same way (p. 147). Furthermore, Falk reasons that if people learning science

“embrace the YEC perspective, then they will not have a place at the table” (p. 49). Of course! Because “the table” only admits those who submit to naturalism!

Contrasting testimonies

Reading the testimonies of Wood and Falk, it becomes apparent that, as children, they had different foundations to their faith. Wood had a solid biblical foundation, including creation, but Falk did not, and the results are very telling. Wood mentions a couple of minor intellectual crises which he went through at university, whereas Falk admits he fell away altogether because of doubts he had regarding the Bible. For Wood, it was after reading John Horner’s *Digging Dinosaurs*, which describes nests buried in multiple layers in the same location,⁹ that doubts were raised as to how more than one layer containing nests in the Flood was possible. However, Michael Oard has published answers to exactly this question, which Wood does not mention.¹⁰

Doubting God, believing evolution

Chapter four makes sad reading as Falk narrates his faith struggles over questions of evolution. He claims saving faith aged four (p. 65), but by the age of eleven he professed doubts that Scripture accurately described physical reality, based on his childish interpretation of the “four corners of the earth” (Revelation 7:1, 20:8). In seventh grade, he encountered teaching about evolution and human fossils and their interpretation by “really intelligent” scientists. He asked: “Could they all be wrong and the Bible right?” The answer is yes, and the latest fossil evidence more than answers Falk’s objections.¹¹ One feels pity for Falk, as he describes how such questions caused doubts to arise in his young mind. He prayed for a

confirming sign of God’s reality, which he says wasn’t forthcoming (p. 67).

Later, Falk attended the University of Alberta, where he obtained a genetics degree but, while there, abandoned his faith (pp. 71–72). During his post-doctoral fellowship, he had a change of heart for the sake of his children, so that they would not abandon Christianity and experience the emptiness he was feeling. Falk relates how he returned to God but he expresses no doubt that God used evolution to create (p. 70). This caused him to feel there was no place for him or his family in evangelical churches. This is tragic, firstly because Falk admits he doubted God’s existence rather than doubting evolution. Secondly, his commitment to evolution dictated which kind of church his family attended—a liberal church which had “no problem” with his views on evolution.

After post-doctoral work, Falk joined the faculty of Syracuse University. He longed to be part of a “dynamic church” emphasizing a “personal relationship with Christ”, but without feeling like a “second-class citizen” because of his acceptance of “mainstream science” (p. 75). Falk eventually found a church that accommodated his views, so was happy to take his family there. Here he taught young adults in Sunday school—though one wonders what compromises of Scripture with man’s thinking they may have been exposed to?

Genesis is history

Chapter seven, by Wood, makes for comparatively encouraging reading. He correctly states that if Genesis 1–11 is treated as non-historical it affects everything else. For example, the Ten Commandments are founded upon the historical truth of God creating all things in six days. Wood perceptively asks, what are the criteria for accepting any miracle of Christ if we don’t first accept the miracle of creation? Wood asked Falk this very question, but he

“never received a satisfactory answer”, other than that Falk claims to accept the Bible’s historicity, unless there are “really good reasons” to interpret Scripture another way! Wood asks, but what’s a “really good reason?”, as Falk had not explained his thinking (p. 111). It is very clear that Falk places his own reasoning powers above Scripture when it contradicts evolutionary history.

Evolution’s overwhelming evidence?

Falk parades ‘evolution as fact’ in chapter nine and this remains unchallenged in F&H, so his claims will be briefly examined here. The search for fossil intermediates between fish and amphibians, Falk explains, was predicted to yield results at c. 370 million years ago. Lo and behold, after five years of searching, a team discovered a fossil allegedly having both fish and tetrapod characteristics, which Falk states was “consistent with the hypothesis” (p. 130). Presumably he is referring to *Tiktaalik roseae*, the much older ancestors of which (according to dating methods Falk upholds) were themselves tetrapods, ‘dated’ 18 million years older. *Tiktaalik*, therefore, should be relegated to an evolutionary side-branch, thus divesting it of its ‘missing link’ status.¹² But this was understood nearly a decade ago. Maybe *Tiktaalik* is an icon he just can’t let go?

Falk discusses the correlation between radiometrically dated rocks and the fossil order expected by evolution. From single-celled creatures through to multi-cellular organisms in rocks of decreasing age, Falk states, “this is exactly what is found” (p. 135). But this is exactly what is not found in many instances! Out-of-order fossils are common,¹³ and the proverbial ‘Cambrian rabbit’ exists, specifically in the form of pollen in pre-Cambrian rock—pollen (necessarily produced by multi-cellular plants) believed to have evolved one billion years later within

the evolutionary time-scale.¹⁴ And this despite Falk's clear pronouncement that rocks "greater than one billion years old have never revealed a fossil of a multicellular plant ..." (p. 136).

The so-called Cambrian Explosion was the glaring exemplar of the rule of lack of transitional creatures in Darwin's time, becoming increasingly obvious in the subsequent 150 years of worldwide paleontological research, demonstrating that the lack of transitional forms from non-life to every basic body plan of all major phyla is real.¹⁵

Falk also disagrees with Wood's reading of Genesis on the basis that "it contains poetic elements" (p. 133). Falk needs to be called out here on his sloppy biblical hermeneutics. Hebrew scholars identify the genre of the creation and Flood passages in Genesis as historical narrative, not poetry, by the presence of Hebrew narrative tense markers—*waw*-consecutives.¹⁶

Fellowship at any cost

Within eight pious 'interludes', between opposing chapters, moderator Rob Barrett clearly demands fellowship at the expense of truth (correct doctrine). He calls for Christians to offer their lives for each other, even as Christ did, quoting John 15:13 (p. 17). But when it comes to the age of the earth, that verse is not a command for Christians to lay down truth! Scripture says we are to "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 1:3), to lay down our lives, yes, but not truth. Jesus never once laid down truth! Barrett misuses Matthew 22:40:

"All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments", asking, "if everything hangs on these two things, maybe the battle over evolution does too ... could asking for forgiveness when we've offended a brother be mysteriously linked to resolving the controversy over evolution?" (p. 103).

Barrett is both subtle and manipulative. Yes, we are commanded in

Scripture to love and forgive, but that same Scripture makes definite claims about creation which can only resolve the origins controversy if its claims are accepted. Furthermore, what is the biblical definition of love if it fails to rebuke, warn, and reprove (1 Timothy 5:20, 2 Timothy 4:2, Titus 1:13)? And what of those who profess Christ, but will not repent of their error? Paul was clear in his letter to Titus, that a divisive person should be warned "once, and then ... a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them" (Titus 3:9–11, cf. 2 John 1:10–11). These clear biblical guidelines on dealing with false teaching and divisiveness within the church need to be followed.

Reading F&H one gains the impression the Colossian Forum was driven by another agenda—one aligned with the dangerous false teaching promoted by *BioLogos*. Barrett's ploy, therefore, is an insidious bullying tactic to get YECs to compromise truth for the sake of 'unity'.

Here's the rub: if fellowship is not based on truth, it is not genuine fellowship; it is capitulation. The Apostle John (2:1) said we shouldn't eat, have fellowship with, or even greet those who claim to profess Christ, but do "not abide in the teaching of Christ". So according to this rule, is the endeavour of this book and continuing fellowship¹⁷ with Falk and *BioLogos* a contravention of this Scriptural mandate? I am not saying that because Falk and *BioLogos* believe in evolution that this somehow disqualifies them from being born-again. The issue here is can fellowship be maintained with Christians who, after being corrected, continue to promote false teaching?

Jesus' clear teachings on Creation and the Flood consistently upheld Genesis as divinely inspired, authoritative history. Neither Jesus, nor any of the New Testament writers, taught anything that could be construed as support for biological evolution, or a billions-of-years age for the earth. Those who believe evolution is true knowingly or unknowingly make

Christ and His Heavenly Father out to be in error when it comes to Earth history—which is blasphemous.¹⁸ How can there be unity with those who knowingly hold such positions?

Conclusion

A particular study question stood out, which asks:

"Most young-earth creationists are critical of Todd for acknowledging that evolutionists have collected a large volume of credible evidence. What do you think? Is he hurting the cause by giving evolutionists so much credit? Or is he giving creationists greater credibility?" (p. 37).

This is quite the question to ask, because Wood has made some baffling statements in support of evolution, both in this book and elsewhere. There is a danger that unchallenged dialogue of this sort might actually bring biblical creationism into disrepute in the eyes of unwary or less-informed readers.

F&H only muddies the water. There is no adequate accountability in the exchange recorded in the book, in terms of holding Falk to account for his brazen evolution proselytizing. None of Falk's 'tired old' arguments are rebutted, and, unfortunately, Wood just adds more fuel to the fire. His concessions to the other side were not matched. Clearly they didn't help move Falk away from his compromised view, but might well have enabled Falk to think he was moving Wood towards an evolutionary view.

Barrett's interludes promoting unity at all costs leave the casual reader with the impression that YEC is the problem—a lost cause. F&H, therefore, makes for uncomfortable reading for biblical creationists. What may be more concerning is that Wood's continued dialogue with *BioLogos* and the Colossian Forum (p. 193) appears to be going where angels fear to tread. Brave or naive? Only time will tell, but some readers may consider the

warning of Matthew 7:6 is relevant here.

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