

ATHENS AND JERUSALEM

Science-and-Religion Strategies among
Interpreters of Genesis 1 **in the Modern Era**

Athens and Jerusalem: A Suitable Idea Map?

- In 2005, US philosophy professor John Caiazza used Athens and Jerusalem as a template for a mostly conflicted **science-religion** relationship, influenced by C20th thinker Leo Strauss.
- One response in the same journal issue disputes the transfer of this template from an ancient & **philosophical** contrast to a modern dispute about sources of truth.
- The same author continues by saying that Tertullian is in fact concerned with "two **educational systems** and two sets of **canonical texts**" against the background of establishing the credibility of Christianity in Greco-Roman society. This is more specific again.
- The take-away: this motif is to be **used with caution** and qualifications if applied to science and religion!

What Did Tertullian Actually Write?

Tertullian (c. 160–c. 220), an educated, early apologist & polemicist for the Christian church, lived in Carthage, and was a key early Western theologian.

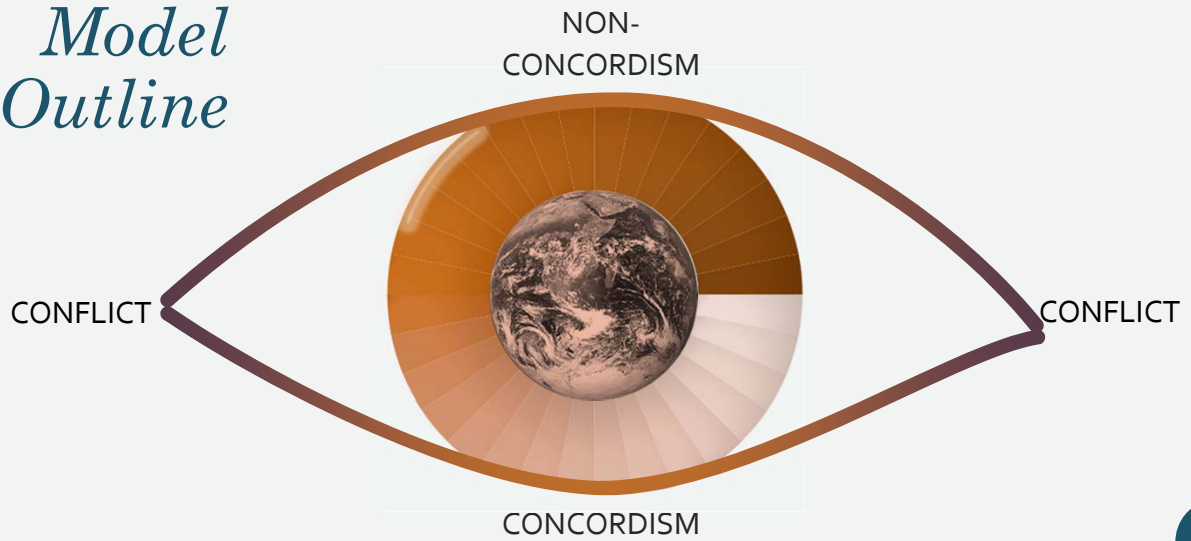
Unhappy Aristotle! who invented for these men dialectics, the art of building up and pulling down; an art so evasive in its propositions, so far-fetched in its conjectures, so harsh, in its arguments, so productive of contentions—embarrassing even to itself, retracting everything, and really treating of nothing! Whence spring those “fables and endless genealogies,” and “unprofitable questions,” and “words which spread like a cancer?” From all these, when the apostle would restrain us, he expressly names *philosophy* as that which he would have us be on our guard against. Writing to the Colossians, he says, “See that no one beguile you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, and contrary to the wisdom of the Holy Ghost.” He had been at Athens, and had in his interviews (with its philosophers) become acquainted with that human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, whilst it only corrupts it, and is itself divided into its own manifold heresies, by the variety of its mutually repugnant sects. **What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?** What concord is there between the Academy and the Church? what between heretics and Christians? Our instruction comes from “the porch of Solomon,” who had himself taught that “the Lord should be sought in simplicity of heart.” Away with all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition! We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after enjoying the gospel! With our faith, we desire no further belief.

Extract from *Prescription against Heretics* 7*

Section One

MODELLING the INTERACTION of SCIENCE and CHRISTIANITY

Model Outline

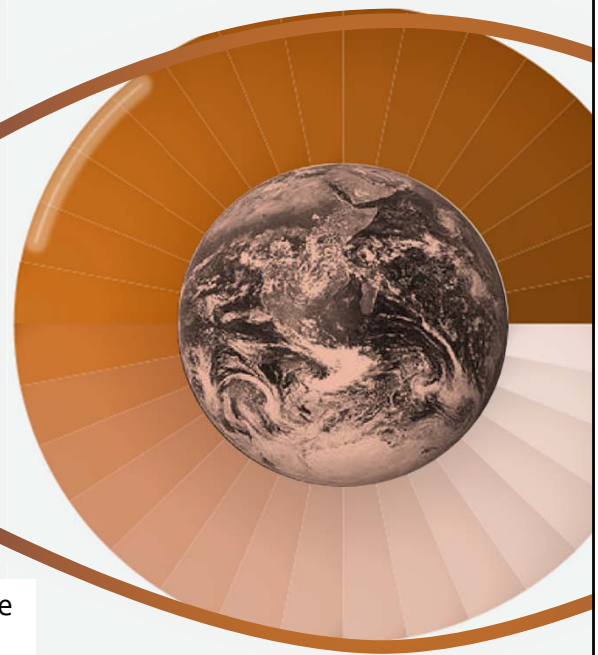


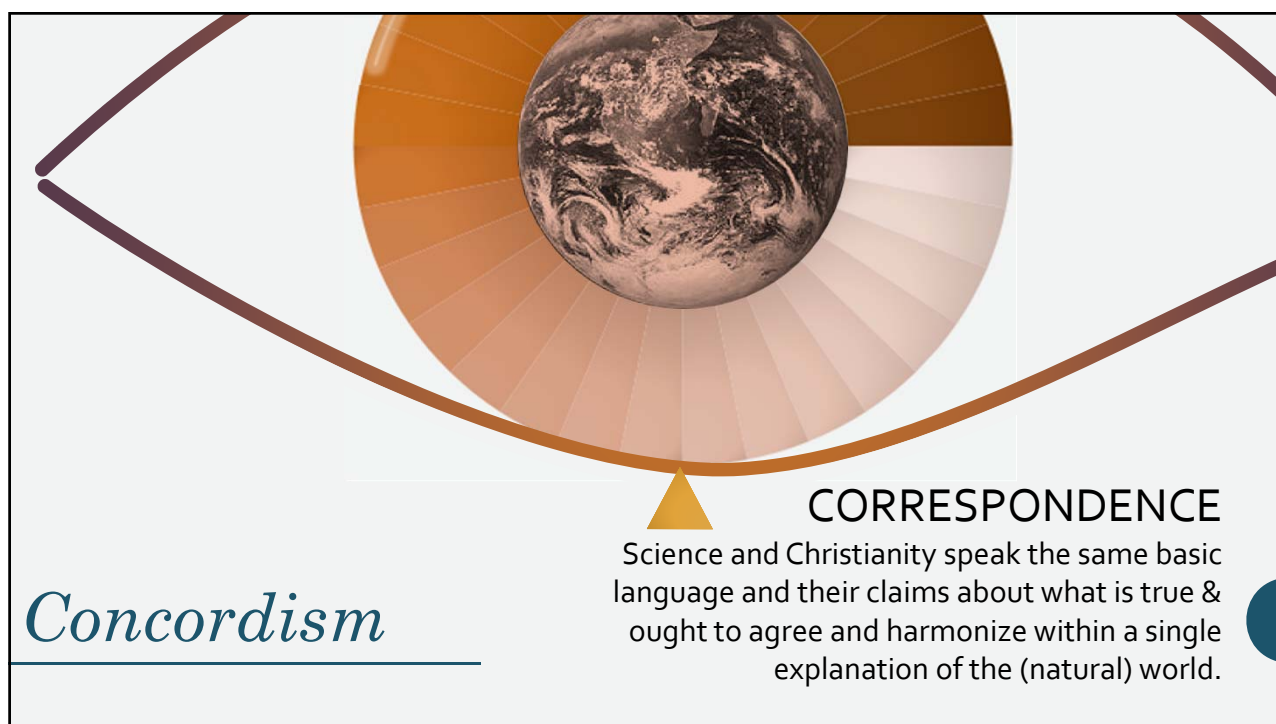
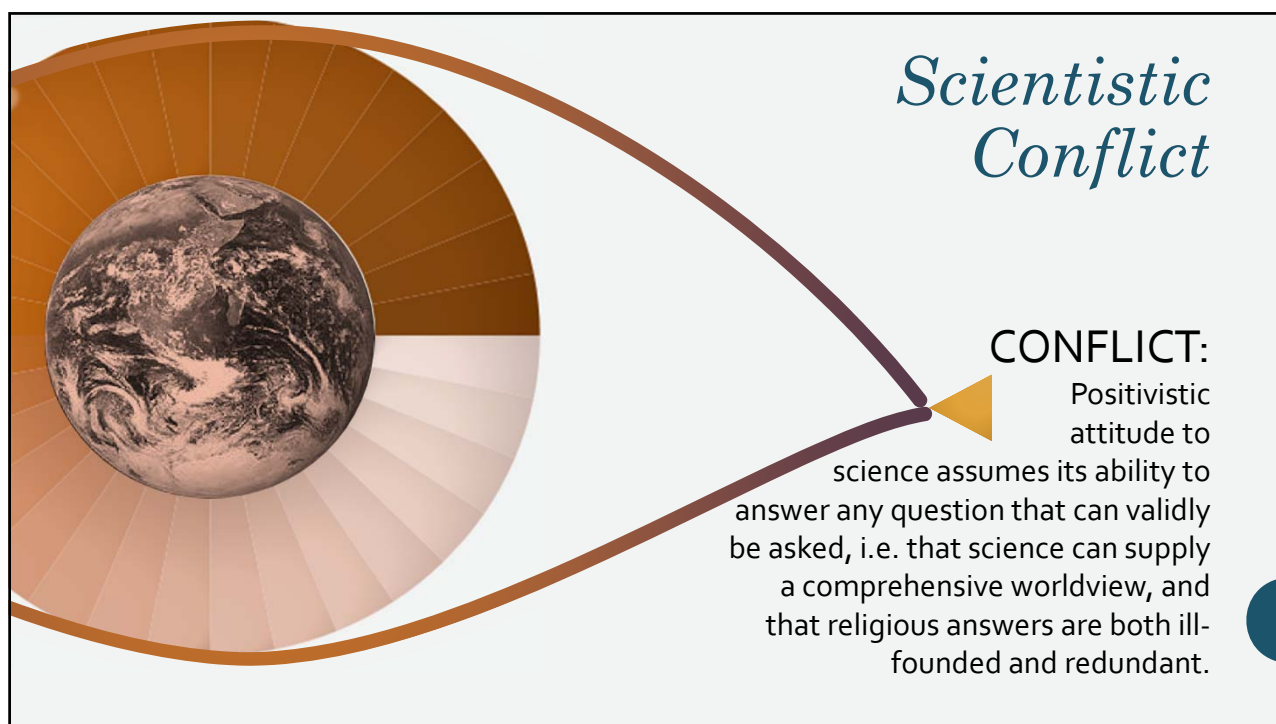
Biblicist Conflict

CONFLICT:

Validity of science acknowledged in principle, but belied by broad-based rejection of mainstream science in practice.

It is assumed that the Bible supplies a complete and reliable framework for understanding the origin and function of the natural world.



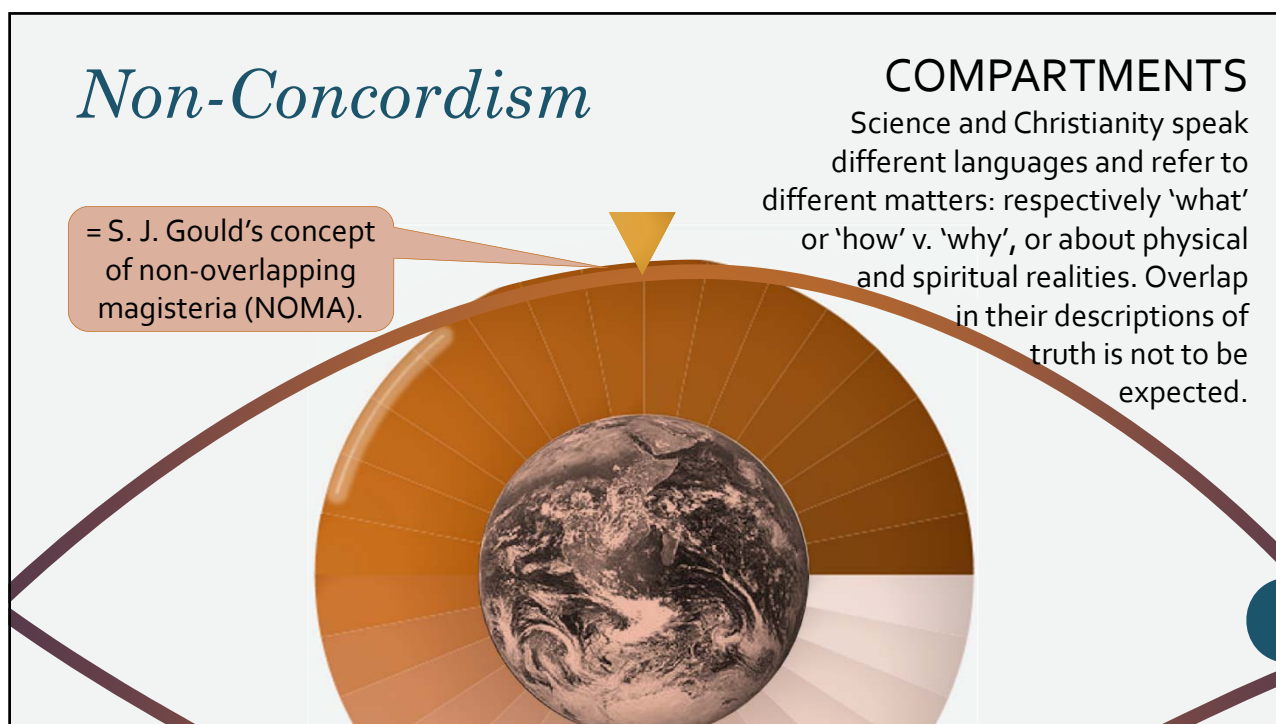


Non-Concordism

= S. J. Gould's concept of non-overlapping magisteria (NOMA).

COMPARTMENTS

Science and Christianity speak different languages and refer to different matters: respectively 'what' or 'how' v. 'why', or about physical and spiritual realities. Overlap in their descriptions of truth is not to be expected.



Non-Concordism: An Unstable Equilibrium?

Despite the implicit view of the non-competitiveness of science and faith, greater interest and/or greater credence is often accorded more to one end of the science-religion spectrum than the other.



Section Two

SELECT EXAMPLES from the DAWN of MODERN SCIENCE

Noteworthy Early Precedents for Science- Religion Discussion

Augustine,
*The Literal
Meaning of
Genesis*

"Usually, even a non-Christian knows something about the earth, the heavens, and the other elements of this world....It is disgraceful and dangerous for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Holy Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics."

Calvin,
*Commentary
on Genesis*

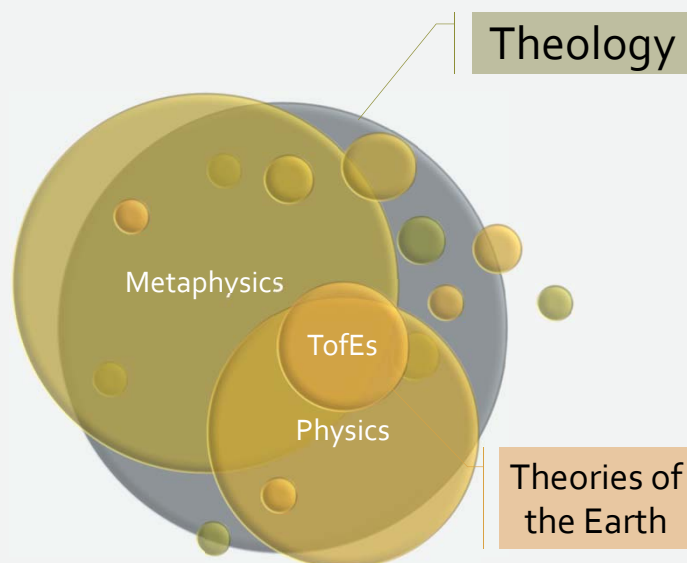
"To be so occupied in the investigation of the secrets of nature, as never to turn the eyes to its Author, is a most perverted study." "God...clothes himself, so to speak, with the image of the world, in which he would present himself to our contemplation." "Let the world become our school if we desire rightly to know God."

Galileo,
'Letter to
the Grand
Duchess
Christina'

"Let us grant...that theology is conversant with the loftiest divine contemplation...if she does not descend to the...subordinate sciences...then her professors should not...decide on controversies in professions which they have neither studied nor practiced."

The Early Modern Quest for a Grand Unified Theory

Systems of Nature and Theories of the Earth:
A Case Study in Genesis 1 Interpretation and Science- and-Religion Stances



Isaac Newton & Thomas Burnet: Tension over Concordism (1681)

BURNET'S NON-CONCORDISM

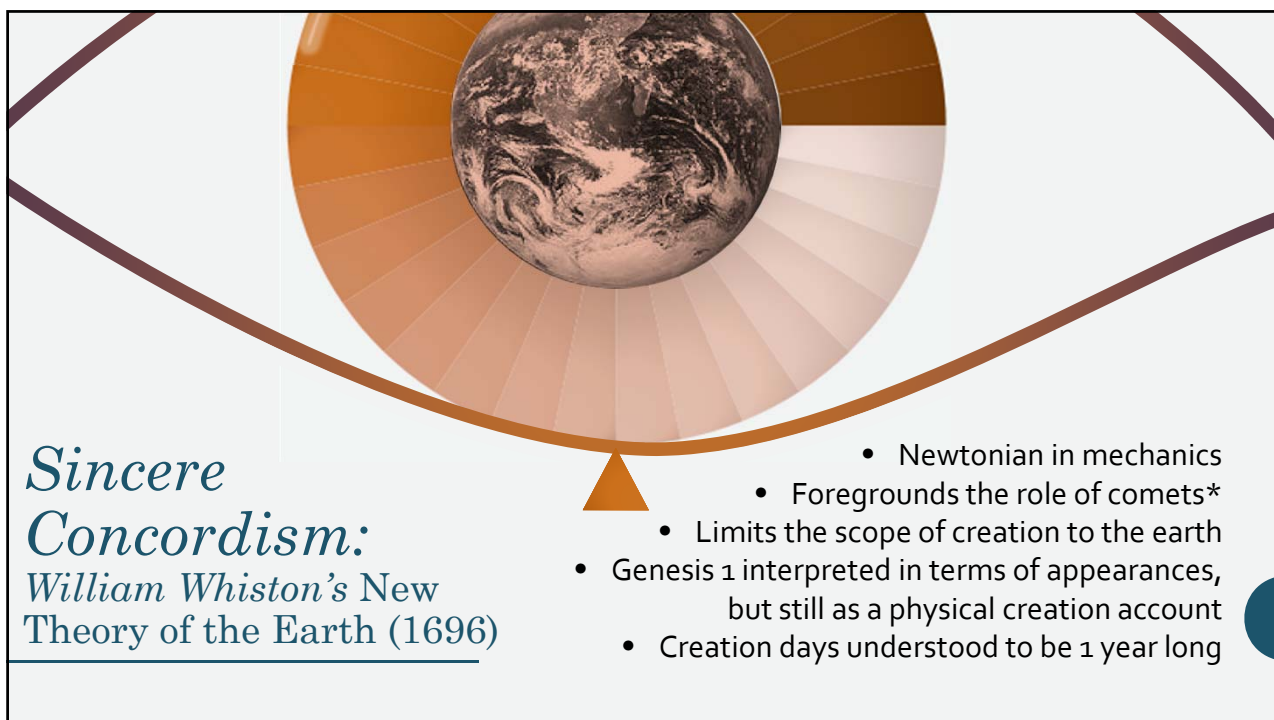
"If you make ye firmament to bee ye Atmosphere...& ye vapours above it to bee ye celestial waters,...wth all my heart: but then how are ye Sun Moon & stars placd in this firmament?"

"...ye distinction of 6 dayes in ye Mosaical formation of ye world is noe physical reality,...neither is this draught of ye creation physical but Ideal, or if you will, morall."

"As to Moses I do not think his description of ye creation either Philosophical or feigned, but that he described realities in a language artificially adapted to ye sense of ye vulgar."

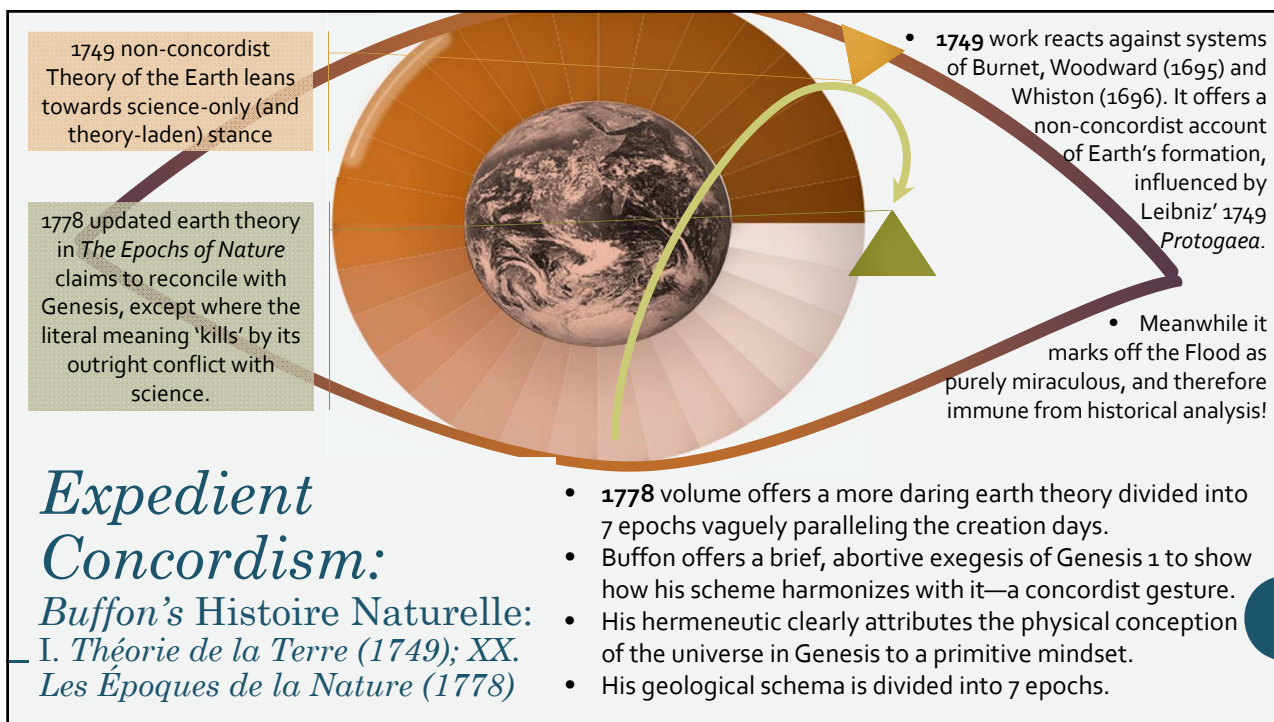
NEWTON'S CONCORDISM

"...me thinks that one of the tenn commandments given by God in mount Sina...should not be grounded on a fiction."



Sincere Concordism:
William Whiston's New Theory of the Earth (1696)

- Newtonian in mechanics
- Foregrounds the role of comets*
- Limits the scope of creation to the earth
- Genesis 1 interpreted in terms of appearances, but still as a physical creation account
- Creation days understood to be 1 year long



1749 non-concordist Theory of the Earth leans towards science-only (and theory-laden) stance

1778 updated earth theory in *The Epochs of Nature* claims to reconcile with Genesis, except where the literal meaning 'kills' by its outright conflict with science.

- 1749 work reacts against systems of Burnet, Woodward (1695) and Whiston (1696). It offers a non-concordist account of Earth's formation, influenced by Leibniz' 1749 *Protogaea*.
- Meanwhile it marks off the Flood as purely miraculous, and therefore immune from historical analysis!
- 1778 volume offers a more daring earth theory divided into 7 epochs vaguely paralleling the creation days.
- Buffon offers a brief, abortive exegesis of Genesis 1 to show how his scheme harmonizes with it—a concordist gesture.
- His hermeneutic clearly attributes the physical conception of the universe in Genesis to a primitive mindset.
- His geological schema is divided into 7 epochs.

Expedient Concordism:
Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*:
I. *Théorie de la Terre* (1749); XX. *Les Époques de la Nature* (1778)

Non-Concordism:

J. G. Herder's Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts (1774–76)

Herder's vigorous non-concordism serves a dominantly biblical interest in this work.

- Rejects the idea of interpreting Genesis 1 as sequential account of physical creation.
 - Rejects and mocks all (meta)physical systems.
- Defends Genesis text as God's revelation.
 - Romantic emphasis on the feeling of the narrative
 - Veers into cabbalistic mysticism.

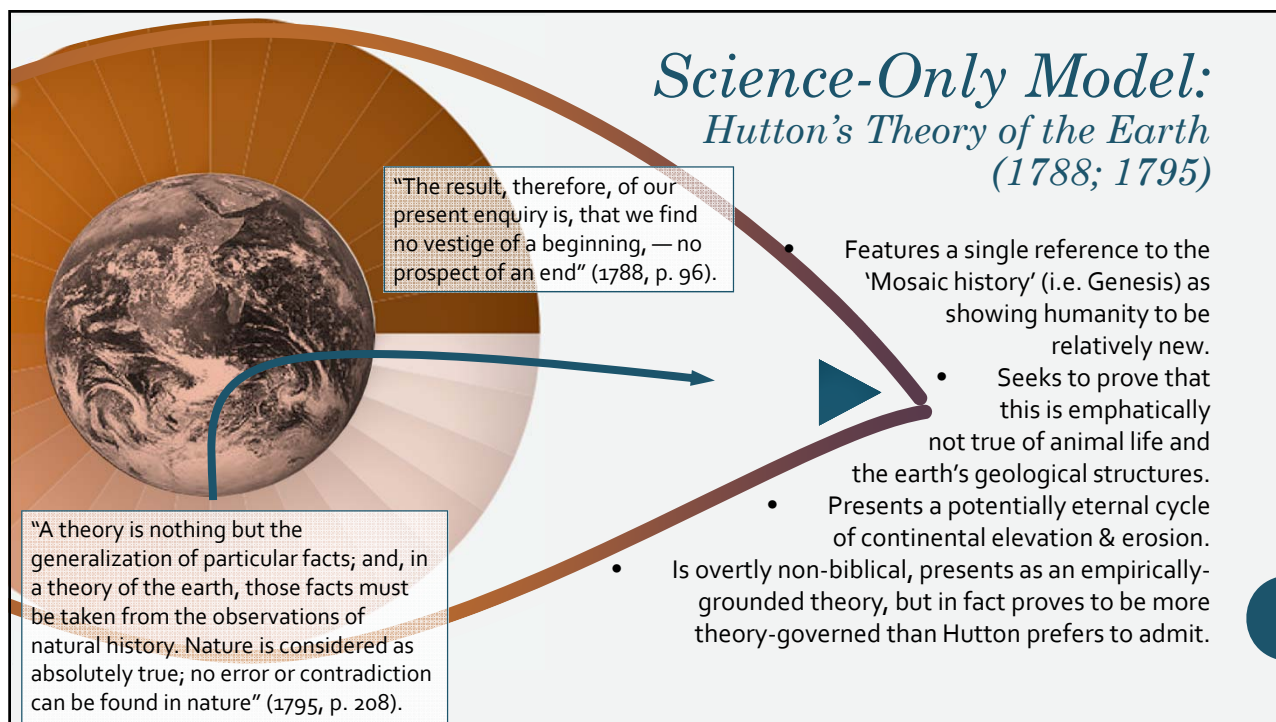


Science-Only Model: *Hutton's Theory of the Earth (1788; 1795)*

"The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, — no prospect of an end" (1788, p. 96).

"A theory is nothing but the generalization of particular facts; and, in a theory of the earth, those facts must be taken from the observations of natural history. Nature is considered as absolutely true; no error or contradiction can be found in nature" (1795, p. 208).

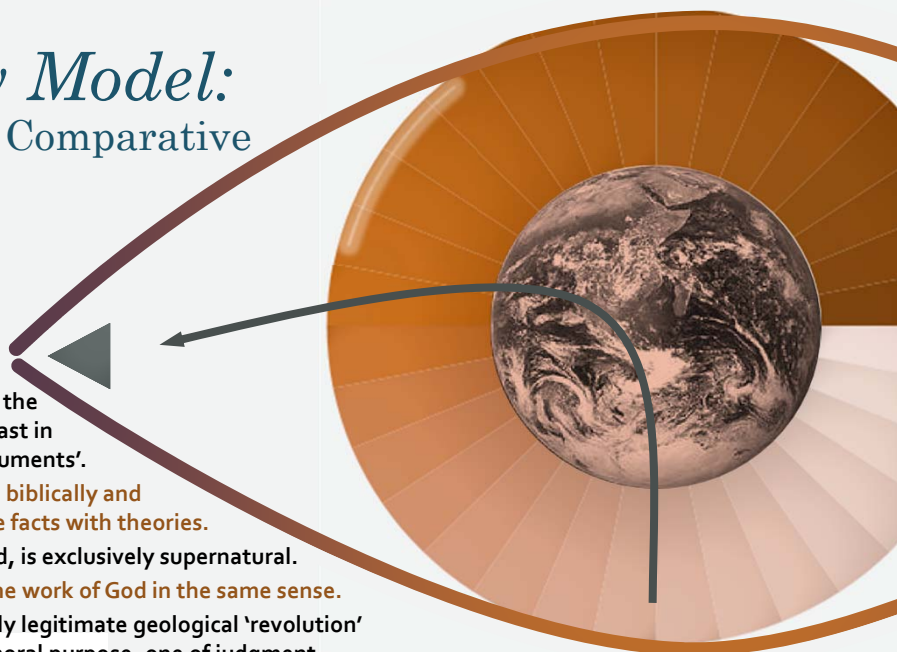
- Features a single reference to the 'Mosaic history' (i.e. Genesis) as showing humanity to be relatively new.
 - Seeks to prove that this is emphatically not true of animal life and the earth's geological structures.
- Presents a potentially eternal cycle of continental elevation & erosion.
- Is overtly non-biblical, presents as an empirically-grounded theory, but in fact proves to be more theory-governed than Hutton prefers to admit.



Bible-Only Model: *Granville Penn's Comparative Estimate (1822)*

TENETS OF BELIEF OF THE 'SCRIPTURAL GEOLOGISTS'

- Scripture (Genesis) relates information about the earth's geological history.
- Written documents provide the only reliable access to the past in contrast to geological 'monuments'.
- Alternate earth theories fail biblically and philosophically, and confuse facts with theories.
- Creation, as the work of God, is exclusively supernatural.
- Natural processes are not the work of God in the same sense.
- The Flood of Noah is the only legitimate geological 'revolution' or catastrophe, and had a moral purpose, one of judgment.
- An ancient earth empty of humans is theologically absurd.



Semi-Concordism: *William Buckland's* *Bridgewater Treatise (1837)*

Roughly equivalent to:

- The ruin-restitution theory of J. G. Rosenmüller (1776)
- The gap theory of Thomas Chalmers (c. 1833)
- The limited gap theory of John Pye Smith (1840)

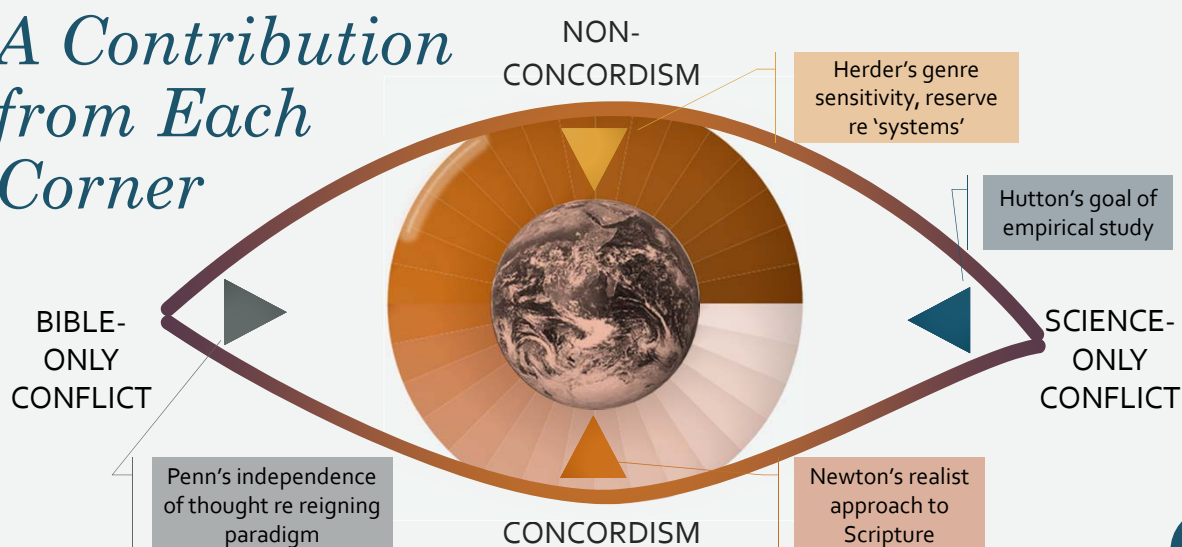
- Retains a C18th natural theology sensibility.
- Admits the old-earth implications of geological evidence.
- Abandons day-age interpretation of Genesis as unworkable.
- Finds room for geological ages in an implied deep past in Gen. 1:1–2.



Section Three

IMPLICATIONS for the INTERACTION of SCIENCE and CHRISTIANITY

A Contribution from Each Corner



The Necessary Limitation of Revelation

*From William
Buckland's
Bridgewater
Treatise (1836)*

"The disappointment of those who look for a detailed account of geological phenomena in the Bible, rests on a gratuitous expectation of finding therein historical information, respecting all the operations of the Creator in times and places with which the human race has no concern....[at] what point...short of a communication of Omniscience [might] such a revelation...have stopped?"

"The above supposed communication of omniscience would have been imparted to creatures, utterly incapable of receiving it..."



A Theology of Nature from Genesis 1

God

- Alone
- Authoritative
- Able
- Altruistic

Humanity

- Intended
- Ultimate
- Imaged
- Authorized
- Employed

Nature

- Intended
- Temporal
- Orderly
- Lively
- Subordinate
- Good