

Fossils in the Geologic Column —Problems for Evolution

Mark Bergemann

In the last issue of the *LSI Journal* we saw how evolutionists and creationists interpret the geologic column differently.

Like much of evolution theory, the geologic column is a mixture of reality and fabrication. The vast time evolutionists assign to the column is the problem, not the rock layers and fossils in the column, nor their sequence. To a geologist who assumes deep time (millions of years), the geologic column shows over 500 million years of common descent. To a geologist who believes in creation,¹ the geologic column shows created kinds of plants and creatures killed in the Noachian Flood and mostly deposited over a five-month period.²

Both evolutionists and creationists are confronted with problems understanding the geologic column. That will always be the case. Scientists (both evolutionists and creationists) develop scientific models in attempts to explain how the column came to be. Those models are simply explanations based on the presuppositions of those making them. The presuppositions of scientists (both evolutionists and creationists) are covered in the geologic column article quoted above.

Most science textbooks assert that the column fits millions of years without major issue. The truth is that assuming the geologic column shows millions of years of common descent leads to many problems.

¹ Some creationists accept other possibilities for the origin of fossils, such as God creating fossils during creation week. This article presents the overwhelmingly predominant creationist view that most fossils are a result of Noah's Flood. For a brief discussion of other possibilities, see "Dinosaur Fossils Explained" www.LutheranScience.org/dino (accessed March 13, 2018)

² Mark Bergemann, "Geologic Column," *LSI Journal* 32, no. 1 (2018): 21. www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter (accessed March 13, 2018)

“Extinct” Plants and Animals Found Living

Evolutionists interpret the geologic column as showing *when* various plants and animals first evolved, and *if and when* they became extinct. If fossils of a formerly living thing are found in one or more successive rock layers, but not found in all the layers above those layers, that living thing is assumed to have become extinct.

Coelacanth

A fish called the coelacanth was found in rock layers evolutionists claim are 65 million years old, but not in the many layers claimed to be more recent, so evolutionists declared that the coelacanth became extinct 65 million years ago. Evolutionists were amazed when a living coelacanth was found in South African waters in 1938. There are now two known species of coelacanth, living near Africa and near Indonesia. Coelacanths are 6.5 ft. in length and weigh 198 lb.³

Wollemi Pine

Evolutionists thought trees like this went extinct millions of years ago,

The full-grown version ...of a prehistoric pine tree found in August [1994] in a secluded rain forest ...the Wollemi pine is a newly discovered genus whose nearest relatives died out in the Jurassic and Cretaceous eras 195-140 million and 140-65 million years ago respectively.⁴

Wollemi pines 131 ft. tall with trunks 3.3 ft. wide⁵ are found at Australia's Wollemi National Park.⁶ Young trees have been nurtured at the Kew Royal Botanical Gardens in London, England, since 1997.⁷ Our cover photo of a young Wollemi was taken at Kew in 2012.

3 National Geographic, “Coelacanth,” (accessed March 13, 2018)

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/fish/group/coelacanths/>

4 “‘Fossil Tree’ reveals full splendor,” *Nature*, 372, (December 22/29, 1994).

<http://www.nature.com/articles/372719c0.pdf> (accessed March. 13, 2018)

5 Wollemi Australia Pty Ltd, “About the Wollemi Pine,”

<http://www.wollemipine.com/aboutwp.php> (accessed March 13, 2018)

6 NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, “Wollemi National Park,”

<https://www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/visit-a-park/parks/wollemi-national-park> (accessed March 13, 2018)

7 Tony Hall, “UK’s first Wollemi pines from seed,” in *In the Gardens Blog*, Kew Royal Botanic Gardens. (accessed March 13, 2018)

<https://www.kew.org/blogs/in-the-gardens/uks-first-wollemi-pines-from-seed>

Dawn Redwood

“The dawn redwood was once one of the most widespread tree species in the Northern Hemisphere,” but it was “thought to have been extinct for 20 million years.” Then in 1944, it was found living in China. It “can grow taller than 160 ft. with a trunk about 7 ft. in diameter.” This redwood is unique because it is not an evergreen. “It sheds its leaves in the fall, is bare in winter and grows new leaves in the spring.”⁸ A young dawn redwood growing on the grounds of the US Capitol is shown on the back cover. The large trunk of a somewhat older dawn redwood is on page 31.

Many fossil specimens of the coelacanth and dawn redwood, and fossils of trees similar to the Wollemi pine, are found in some layers of the geologic column. There are so many dawn redwood fossils that it is considered to have at one time been “one of the most widespread tree species in the Northern Hemisphere.” In contrast, not one of these fossils has been found in the upper layers of the geologic column. *If each layer of the geologic column represents time (millions of years), then why did dawn redwoods not form fossils for 20 million years, coelacanths not form fossils for 65 million years, and trees similar to the Wollemi pine not form fossils for 65 million years?*

Evolutionist Bill Nye often comments about evidence which evolutionists cannot explain: “It is a mystery.”^{9,10} It is not a mystery to creationists since the flood explains why fossils may not be found in every layer of the geologic column. A creationist explanation of how the Flood may have produced the geologic column is expressed in the article “Geologic Column,” published in the winter 2018 issue of the *LSI Journal*, www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter.

⁸ Save The Redwoods League, “Dawn Redwoods,” (accessed March 13, 2018) <https://www.savetheredwoods.org/redwoods/dawn-redwoods/>

⁹ Bill Nye, “Bill Nye: Lack of impact craters on Pluto ‘a mystery,’” interview by Pamela Brown, CNN, 2015, video, 2:13, (accessed March 13, 2018) www.LutheranScience.org/NyePlutoCNN

¹⁰ The source of consciousness “is a mystery” (0:00), and what was before the big bang “is a great mystery” (1:06). Bill Nye, “‘It’s a mystery’ vs. ‘It’s in the Bible,’” interview by Tom Forman during the February 4, 2014, debate with Ken Ham, cincinnati.com, (accessed March 13, 2018) <https://www.cincinnati.com/videos/news/2014/04/16/7772599/>

“Discontinuous” Animal and Plant Groups

Evolutionist and biologist Jerry Coyne, wrote in his *New York Times* best-selling book, *Why Evolution is True*,

The most striking fact about nature is that it is discontinuous. When you look at animals and plants, each individual almost always falls into one of many discrete groups.¹¹

What Coyne admits about animals and plants alive today, is also true of the fossil record. The fossil record shows “discontinuous” groups (or Biblical kinds) of plants and animals without intermediates. Jerry Bergman (Ph. D biology)¹² documents this in his 2017 book, *Fossil Forensics –Separating Fact from Fantasy in Paleontology*. Bergman writes in chapter 1,

By most biologists, the fossil record is thought to be a major source of evidence for evolution. However, as I researched life as related to its putative evolution, I realized that the fossil record is actually one of evolution’s major problems. As this work documents, the fossils tell a very clear account of the history of life quite in contradiction to the story of Darwinism. ...Many evolutionists acknowledge that the fossil record in their specialty lacks evidence for evolution, but maintain their faith in the theory because they believe that other specialties have shown evolution to be true. Therefore, by considering a number of

¹¹ Jerry A. Coyne, *Why Evolution is True* (New York: Viking Penguin Group, 2009), 169.

¹² “Dr. Bergman has taught biology, anthropology, geology, anatomy and other courses at the college level for over 40 years. He is currently an adjunct Associate Professor at the University of Toledo Medical College. He has nine earned degrees, including a doctorate from Wayne State University. ... Dr. Bergman has presented over one hundred scientific papers at professional meetings. His research has made the front page in newspapers throughout the country four times.” Quoted from:

Jerry Bergman, *Fossil Forensics –Separating Fact from Fantasy in Paleontology* (United States: Bartlett Publishing, 2017), ix.

different areas of the fossil record, I hope to better show the pattern of the fossil record, and its difficulty for reconciling with evolution.¹³

I have previously written about how the assumptions of evolutionists direct and constrain their science. One such assumption is common descent.

Evolutionists *assume* all animals and plants descended from a common ancestor, a single-cell life-form. Similarities between animals are *assumed* to be due to common descent, or due to that similar feature evolving twice independently. Evolutionists reject the possibility that similarities (in bone structures, DNA, etc.) are due to common design by a creator.”¹⁴

Yet evolutionists like Coyne notice that life-forms are “discontinuous.” There are significant differences between one creature and another. Dogs and cats are very different, but not as different as dogs and deer. So, an evolutionist places dogs and cats closer together on the supposed common descent family tree (evolution’s tree of life) than they place dogs and deer.

Where to place a given creature on evolution’s tree of life is often rather arbitrary, since so much rests on interpretation of which features are the most, and which are the least, important.

The next two sections briefly examine two examples of how arbitrary and subjective it is to place creatures on evolution’s tree of life. Placement depends on each scientist’s opinions.

¹³ Bergman, 2,3,5.

¹⁴ Mark Bergemann, “Assumptions of Evolutionists,” *LSI Journal* 31, no. 4 (fall 2017): 14. www.LutheranScience.org/2017fall (accessed March 13, 2018)

New Dinosaur Family Tree

There is nothing wrong with classifying plants and animals by the similarity of their features. Such categorization can greatly help in our study of God's creation. This, though, becomes wrong when common descent is claimed, since we know from Scripture that plants and animals did not originate that way.

Last year, prestigious Nature.com, the "International Journal of Science," published an explosive article: "A new hypothesis of dinosaur relationships and early dinosaur evolution."¹⁵ Since 1887, dinosaurs have been classified as being "lizard-hipped" or "bird-hipped."¹⁶ This new study throws that long-held scientific fact out the window. [In science, the term "fact" denotes a temporary truth.^{17, 18}]

This news spread through the scientific and popular media. Here are a few examples:

- "Dinosaur family tree poised for colossal shake-up."¹⁹
- "Dino Family Tree Overturned? Not Quite, But Changes May Lie Ahead."²⁰
- "Shaking Up the Dinosaur Family Tree."²¹

¹⁵ Matthew G. Baron, David B. Norman, Paul M. Barrett, "A new hypothesis of dinosaur relationships and early dinosaur evolution," *Nature*, March 22, 2017. <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature21700> (accessed Feb 26, 2018)

¹⁶ Laura Geggel, Nov 1, 2017. (accessed Feb 26, 2018) <https://www.livescience.com/60837-dinosaur-family-tree-challenged.html>

¹⁷ "Fact: In science, an observation that has been repeatedly confirmed and for all practical purposes is accepted as "true." Truth in science, however, is never final, and what is accepted as a fact today may be modified or even discarded tomorrow." *Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), 2. [pdf page 13.] <http://nap.edu/6024> (accessed March 7, 2018)

¹⁸ For an explanation why laws and theories of science (facts of science) are temporary truth, see: Mark Bergemann, "How Can A Lie Like Evolution Have Scientific Evidence?," *LSI Journal* vol. 29 no. 1 (2015) www.LutheranScience.org/2015lie (accessed March 7, 2018)

¹⁹ Sid Perkins, "Dinosaur family tree poised for colossal shake-up," *Nature*, 22 March 2017. www.LutheranScience.org/DinoTreeNATURE (accessed March 16, 2018)

²⁰ Geggel.

²¹ Nicholas Wade, "Shaking Up the Dinosaur Family Tree," *New York Times*, March 22, 2017. www.LutheranScience.org/DinoTreeNYT (accessed March 16,

- “New Evidence for That Huge Dinosaur Family Tree Rewrite.”²²
- “Ornithoscelida Rises: A New Family Tree for Dinosaurs –A novel phylogenetic hypothesis for Dinosauria!? Shock! Horror! –Say it isn’t so!!!”²³

A November 2017 *Live Science* article tells of yet another study that credits the earlier *Nature* article with being “on to something.” That *Live Science* article then contends that there are three very different ways to draw the dino family tree and each “is just as likely as the other.”

Each of these dinosaur family trees [‘Traditional View,’ ‘New Hypothesis,’ and ‘Long Forgotten View’] is just as likely as the other. ...The original group made some mistakes while characterizing the fossils, and “we corrected those things and re-ran the analysis,” in addition to adding more dinosaur species to the dataset, Brusatte said. The results showed that the traditional family tree was the best fit, but –surprisingly –it wasn’t statistically significant from the tree discovered by Baron and his colleagues. Nor was it statistically different from yet another tree that also reshuffled the relationships. In addition, their statistical analysis indicated that dinosaurs likely originated in southern Pangea,²⁴ rather than northern.²⁵

What happened to cause the questioning of 130 years of dividing dinos between lizard-hipped and bird-hipped? Were new fossils found? No. Old fossils and other old evidence were simply reexamined and organized a new way. The new study “examined 457 anatomical charac-

2018)

22 Gemma Tarlach, “New Evidence for That Huge Dinosaur Family Tree Rewrite,” *Discover Blogs*, August 15, 2017. (accessed March 13, 2018) www.LutheranScience.org/DinoTreeDISCOVER

23 Darren Naish, “Ornithoscelida Rises: A New Family Tree for Dinosaurs -A novel phylogenetic hypothesis for Dinosauria!? Shock! Horror!—Say it isn’t so!!!,” *Scientific American*, March 22, 2017. (accessed March 13, 2018) www.LutheranScience.org/DinoTreeSA

24 Pangea is a proposed supercontinent from which scientists (evolutionists and most creationists) believe our present continents split off. It may be that this splitting took place during and after the Flood.

25 Geggel.

teristics in 74 dinosaur species”²⁶ and, based on that old evidence, redrew the dino family tree. Now a subsequent study published in *Live Science* examines even more old evidence and concludes that *three* very different dino family trees fit the evidence equally well.

The Assumption of Common Descent is the Problem

We should not be surprised that scientific consensus changes, even throwing out long-cherished theories and laws of science. It happens all the time (numerous examples are listed and discussed in a 2015 *LSI Journal* article²⁷). Change is the nature of science.

As Christians, we know for certain that God created each animal kind during a six-day period, thousands of years ago, because God has revealed that to us in Scripture. When evolutionists assume that each kind descended from a previous kind, they make a false assumption. Evolutionists force their scientific models to conform to that false assumption (and many other assumptions also).

Evolutionists are having a hard time drawing a common descent family tree, since kinds did not descend from other kinds. Now God could have created the dinosaur kinds so that they had features which could be put into a single, logical family tree. It appears God did not do so, since evolutionists are having great difficulty attempting to draw such a family tree.

Even if such a family tree could be drawn, it would not mean God used evolution to create. God reveals in Scripture the true history of how he created.

²⁶ Geggel.

²⁷ Mark Bergemann, “How Can A Lie Like Evolution Have Scientific Evidence?,” *LSI Journal* vol. 29 no. 1 (2015) www.LutheranScience.org/2015lie (accessed March 13, 2018)

Placing Humans in Evolution's Tree of Life

Evolutionists often run into problems in their attempt to choose one Biblical kind as the ancestor of another. Here is a second example: Top evolutionary experts disagree on how to place people into evolution's common descent tree of life. As with dinosaurs, placement is arbitrary and subjective.

Every one of our supposed ancestor ape-men is either fully human (and our actual ancestor, a descendant of Adam and Eve) or fully ape (and not our ancestor).²⁸

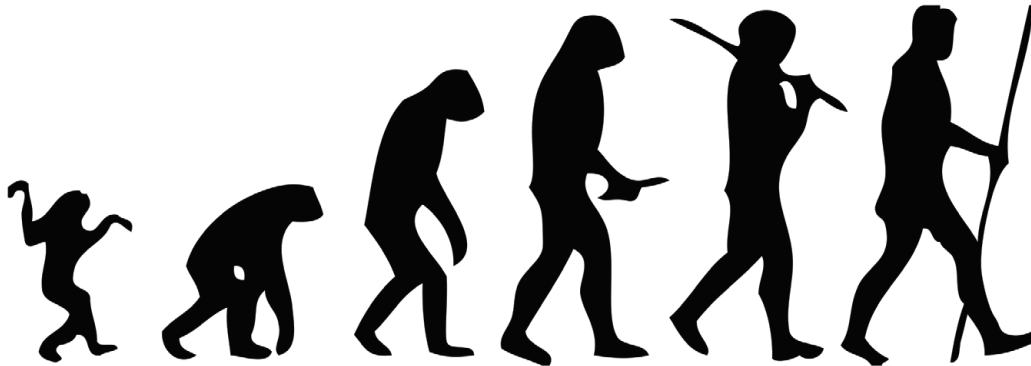
I highly recommend a 2017 book for those who wish to learn the newest developments in human evolution theory: *Contested Bones*,²⁹ available from www.ContestedBones.org and www.ICR.org. This book uses a vast number of quotes from leading paleoanthropologists (scientists who study bones and artifacts of supposed human ancestors). These quotes show that these experts are greatly divided on how to draw the common descent family tree of humans and our supposed ape-like ancestors. Many leading paleoanthropologists actually hold to views that line up with the creationist view that the bones found to date are either fully human or fully ape. Rupe and Sanford write,

We have found that every major new claim that has been widely proclaimed to the public has been challenged by other experts in the field. In many, perhaps most, of those new cases, one of the competing views offered by paleo-experts happens to line up remarkably well with [the creationist view]. . . . The competing views are not merely held by rare dissidents or eccentrics. Typically, it is leading authorities in the field who are expressing dissenting views in highly prestigious scientific journals including *Nature*, *Science*, *Journal of Human Evolution*, *American*

²⁸ Mark Bergemann, "Human or Ape, No In-Between," *LSI Journal* vol. 31 no. 1, 28-31. (winter 2017) www.LutheranScience.org/2017winter (accessed March 13, 2018)

²⁹ Christopher Rupe and John Sanford, *Contested Bones* (FMS Publications, 2017).

*Journal of Physical Anthropology, Proceedings of The National Academy of Sciences, PLOS ONE, and more.*³⁰



One of countless variations on the iconic 1965 Time-Life “March of Progress” graphic.³¹

Rupe and Sanford describe how this famous evolution icon no longer represents current evolutionary thought.

The traditional view of human evolution has been pictured as a simple family lineage something like the iconic March of Progress illustration, where a series of “ape-like” creatures become progressively more human as they march through time. At the time the image was created, evolution was thought to proceed in a straight line, with each ancestral species being replaced by the next. ... However, over the past few decades the picture of human evolution has changed dramatically. New species have replaced the species previously imagined to be the transitional forms, and the idea of a simple linear progression has been completely abandoned.

...Paleoanthropologists now widely acknowledge that the hominin bush has become so messy and tangled that it is not even possible to trace our evolutionary lineage through a series of ape-like ancestors. Most of the major finds that have historically been headlined have later been

³⁰ Rupe and Sanford, 25.

³¹ Image by M. Garde (Original by: José-Manuel Benitos) CC-BY-SA-3.0 via Wikimedia Commons

rejected by leading experts in the field or the paleo-community as a whole. This includes the famous bones referred to as “Neanderthal Man,” “Piltdown Man,” “Zinj,” “Lucy,” Habilis,” “Ardi,” and “Hobbit. Even the very recent finds of “Sediba” and “Naledi” have been quickly ousted from the direct human lineage”³²

Rupe and Sanford seem to summarize much of what they report with these amazing words:

The paleo-community openly acknowledges that the hominin fossil record (the actual data) does not reflect an ape-to-man progression. Instead, there appears to be a clear separation between the ape and human type. There is a lot of diversity within the ape type and a lot of diversity within the human type (with many variants now extinct). There is also branching within each group. Yet we are not seeing a fossil trail connecting these two very distinct groups (ape and man) via a series of intermediate forms.³³

College science textbooks and public media still portray human evolution similar to the linear “March of Progress” concept, where ape-like creatures become “more human as they march through time.”³⁴ Yet the community of scientific experts in human evolution discarded that linear concept years ago. The experts now have no fossils to connect hominin (human) fossils to the ape fossils, since they discarded all previously proposed candidates.

Even if evolutionists find new and convincing intermediate fossils (between ape and man), those fossils would still be either fully human or fully ape (fully animal). We can be certain of that, because God has revealed in Scripture that humans (our ancestors Adam and Eve) and each kind of animal were created during a six-day period, several thousand years ago.

³² Rupe and Sanford, 19-20.

³³ Rupe and Sanford, 320.

³⁴ Rupe and Sanford, 19 -21.

Punctuated Equilibrium

Ever since Darwin published his famous book in 1859, evolutionists have expected to find fossils showing how plants and animals gradually changed from one kind to another. In 2002, famed evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould wrote about the “gradualism” that he (a biologist) and paleontologists (scientists who study ancient fossils) expected to find in the fossil evidence. Instead of finding gradually changing fossils as expected, they found what he calls “the opposite.” They found “abruptness.”

Most importantly, this tale exemplifies what may be the cardinal and dominant fact of the fossil record, something that professional paleontologists learned as soon as they developed tools for an adequate stratigraphic tracing of fossils through time: the great majority of species appear with geological abruptness in the fossil record and then persist in stasis until their extinction. Anatomy may fluctuate through time, but the last remnants of a species usually look pretty much like the first representatives. ... Paleontologists have always recognized the long-term stability of most species, but we had become more than a bit ashamed by this strong and literal signal, for the dominant theory of our scientific culture told us to look for the opposite result of gradualism as the primary empirical expression of every biologist’s favorite subject –evolution itself.³⁵

Another champion of evolution, Bill Nye, also describes this problem. He then mentions the now popular “solution” of “punctuated equilibrium,” a concept first proposed by Gould and Eldridge in 1972. Nye writes in his 2014 book,

...Some of the big mysteries that troubled Darwin lingered on. If anything, filling in the fossil record made

³⁵ Stephen Jay Gould, *The Structure of Evolutionary Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ Press, 2002), 749.

them even more troubling. First, new species seem to show up pretty fast in the geologic record. Darwin pondered this problem when he wrote: “...Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links...?” Second, once a species is established, it and its descendants often hang around, or hang upward into the rock strata, for a long time.

...This challenge was tackled brilliantly in 1972 by two young (but now very well-known) evolutionary biologists: Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould. They did compelling analysis of a tremendous number of fossils and came to realize that, although we have a great many fossils that show us big lines of descent, there is a surprising absence of fossils that would tie certain of these lineages to other lineages. It still wasn’t obvious exactly how dinosaurs became what we think of as modern birds, even once the overall course of that evolution was quite clear. Similarly, it wasn’t obvious how fish ended up walking on land, or how land animals went the other way and ended up swimming around as air breathing fluke-thwapping whales and smiling dolphins. Some of life’s biggest transitions seem to have happened so rapidly that they disappeared between the grooves (or digital bits) of the fossil record. That’s what Eldredge and Gould set out to explain with a spectacular new extension of Darwin’s ideas. You may have heard the phrase they coined for this phenomenon: “punctuated equilibrium.”³⁶

Punctuated equilibrium is the claim that biological evolution often happens very rapidly between long periods of stability. One kind of plant or animal evolves into another kind so fast that it leaves no fossil evidence (or so few fossils that we have not yet found any). Bill Nye, in his quote above, lists several transitions that he believes happened so fast that the

³⁶ Bill Nye, *Undeniable — Evolution and the Science of Creation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2014), 120-121.

result is “a surprising absence of fossils that would tie certain of these lineages to other lineages.” He says, “Some of life’s biggest transitions seem to have happened so rapidly that they disappeared between the grooves (or digital bits) of the fossil record.” He gives the following examples of where there is “a surprising absence of fossils”:

- 1) “How dinosaurs became what we think of as modern birds.”
- 2) “How fish ended up walking on land.”
- 3) “How land animals went the other way and ended up swimming around as air breathing fluke-thwapping whales and smiling dolphins.”

Nye further reports that punctuated equilibrium “has caught on as a description of the mechanism that produces species.”³⁷ He then makes a very weak argument, one which, to a creationist, points out the arbitrary nature of “punctuated equilibrium”:

Once you understand genetic island formation or punctuated equilibrium, it would be weird if things were any other way. The missing nature of missing links is actually further proof of evolution. It’s just what we expect to find out there in nature. If the fossil record were perfect –now *that* would be a mystery.³⁸

Here, Nye actually argues that lack of fossil evidence for common descent is “proof of evolution.” By that logic, it does not matter if the missing fossils are found. Finding fossils of transitional species is evidence for evolution, and the opposite situation, *not* finding those fossils, is also evidence for evolution.

It truly is tortured logic to claim that whatever evidence we find (fossils or no fossils), is evidence for evolution.

³⁷ Nye, 121.

³⁸ Nye, 123.

Conclusion

Evolutionists claim the geologic column shows millions of years of common descent. In reality, evolutionists *impose* the *assumption* of common descent and the *assumption* of deep time (millions of years) on the column, resulting in many logical problems.

A creationist view of the column was presented in the previous issue of the *LSI Journal*. If you have not read that article, “Geologic Column,” it is available on pages 20-31 in the winter 2018 *LSI Journal* at www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter.

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Dawn Redwood, Arnold Arboretum, Boston

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Back cover: Young dawn redwood on grounds of the US Capitol.
Credit: July 2013 by USCapitol via Wikimedia Commons

