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The St. Fagans Pterodactyl: Lies, Damned Lies & Christian Fundamentalism

Gary Hill

On October 14th 2011 on the Creation Today Show (“*impacting our world with the creation message*”) broadcast from Pensacola, Florida, Eric Hovind and Paul Taylor answered viewers’ questions on such diverse topics as dinosaurs, the earth’s magnetic field and the possibility of extraterrestrials visiting Earth. A video of the discourse can be seen [here](#). The particular topic that came to my attention was that of dinosaurs. Both Hovind and Taylor relayed to their audience that there was serious doubt as whether dinosaurs were actually extinct and, if they were, that their extinction was a recent event, measured at most in a few hundreds of years. As Hovind put it:

“.....they’ve lived with man, as is very, very evident”.

To which Paul Taylor replies:

“I’m really not prepared to say that dinosaurs actually are extinct. As I said, I’ll go so far as to say I think they probably are, ‘cause I haven’t seen any, but if they have gone extinct, it’s only fairly recently. You know, you can certainly find historic accounts of people having seen what they might refer to as dragons. Even as recently as two hundred years ago, there’s an account of a civil war battle, sorry I should make clear, English Civil War, not the American Civil War, the English Civil War battle, the battle of St Fagans, which although is in the English Civil war actually took place in Wales. And after the battle in which there were a lot of people dead on the battlefield, there are some eyewitnesses who wrote about it at the time, who reckon that this large huge bird without feathers, this dragon type thing, swooped over the battlefield and was sort of, it was obviously a carrion eating thing, it was having it’s fill of dead bodies, a rather gruesome story but the description sounds very like a pterodactyl type”.

Further examples of the of the 'pterodactyl only became extinct recently if at all' claim are provided by books and websites authored by Jonathon Whitcomb, Norman Huntington and Nathaniel Coleman. On the face of it, then, it appears that Hovind and Taylor are far from the only people making the claim. A little internet sleuthing, however, reveals that these three gentleman are, in fact, the very same person; American fundamentalist Christian and videographer Jonathon Whitcomb. Any reasonable person would come to the conclusion that making an identical claim under three separate names is no more than a dishonest attempt to make the claim appear to be more credible than it actually is. Indeed, Whitcomb has admitted that his evidence relies solely on uncorroborated 'eye-witness' accounts and, after examining over 14,000 photographs of alleged pterodactyls, he has yet to identify a single specimen.

Now, apart from my being utterly incredulous, Hovind, Taylor and the Huntington/Whitcomb/Coleman's pterodactyl claim is of interest to me for three reasons; first, Wales is my adopted country and I have lived here for over 25 years; second, I have visited

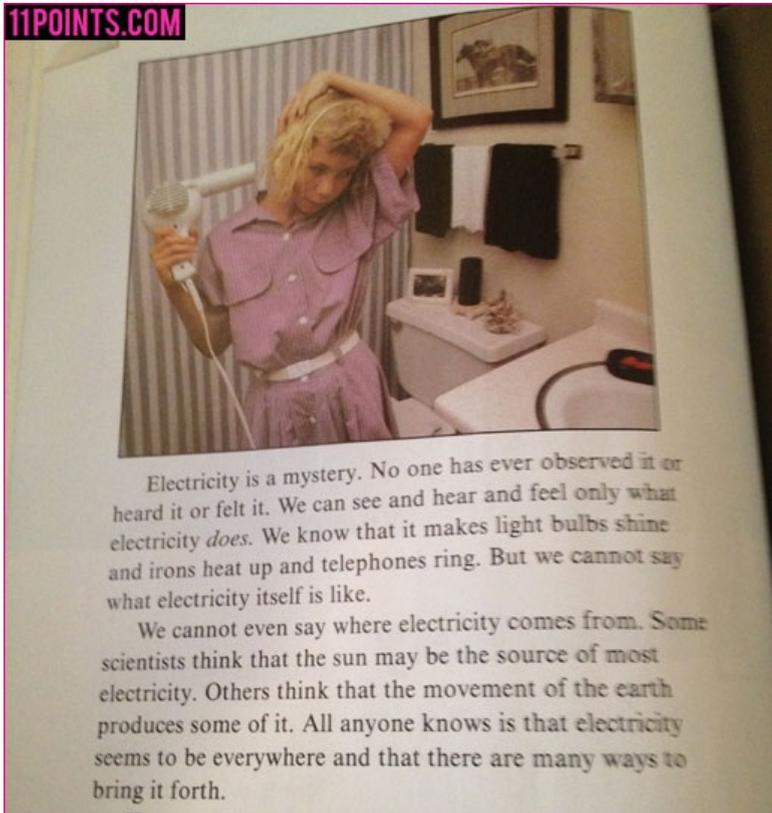
the village of St Fagans several times and third, I have an avid interest in Welsh history. To give you some background to the alleged event: St Fagans is a small village on the western outskirts of Cardiff, which is the capital city of Wales. The battle of St Fagans occurred near the end of the English Civil War in 1648. It is estimated that 3,000 well trained and equipped Roundhead soldiers supporting Parliament confronted 8,000 Royalist soldiers supporting King Charles. The Royalist army were referred to as 'Clubmen', being largely made up of untrained soldiers armed with only clubs and billhooks. It was the largest battle ever to take place on Welsh soil, and quite possibly the shortest. Beginning at 7.00 am, it was all over by 9.00 am with many hundreds of Royalists killed or taken prisoner.

The National Museum of Wales has a very large open-air facility at St. Fagans, including a completely rebuilt traditional Welsh village with exhibits pertaining to Welsh life over the centuries. You would expect, therefore, that the largest battle to take place in Wales would feature prominently in the exhibits, and of course it does. Indeed, in the intervening years, a number of skeletons, cannon balls, musket balls, pykes and buttons have been found on the battle site, many of which are on display at the National Museum. And you would equally expect that such a significant event as written eyewitness reports of a pterodactyl-like bird swooping down and having it's fill of dead bodies would also warrant mention. Except that the event is conspicuous by it's absence. There is simply no mention of pterodactyls at St. Fagans. Indeed there is no mention of pterodactyls at St. Fagans at all, anywhere in the legitimate historical literature or even on the internet, apart from Paul Taylor's claim, broadcast on the Creation Today Show of October 14th 2011. This is especially surprising as, in common with the other Celtic nations, Wales has a long history of imaginative storytelling. Walk around anywhere in the Welsh landscape and choose any landmark and there will probably be a tall story attached to it. The large collection of ancient stories known as the Mabinogi, for example, detail the mythical origins of many Welsh landmarks and the dragons, giants and wizards who dwelt among them. Pterodactyls would certainly not be out of place in Welsh folklore.

Now Paul Taylor is no stranger to Cardiff, or South Wales for that matter. He studied for his Masters Degree at Cardiff University, perhaps 12 km from St Fagans. He then taught chemistry in high schools in South Wales, rising to head of department before quitting teaching in 1999. So why would Paul Taylor make such an extraordinary claim about a geographical area with which he is familiar, without either verifiable historical evidence, or even a tradition of folklore, to back it up? Logically, there can be only two possibilities; either he has been told of the occurrence by someone else and believed it to be true, which would surely label him as being supremely gullible (and surely unfit to teach science), or he is simply being dishonest. My money is on the latter. After all, it was the founder of Protestantism, Martin Luther who wrote:

"What harm would it do, if a man told a good strong lie for the sake of the good and for the Christian church ... a lie out of necessity, a useful lie, a helpful lie, such lies would not be against God, he would accept them."

Although he has never been a practising scientist and has never had a peer reviewed paper published in a scientific journal, Taylor has taught science and should be well aware of the general protocols employed in the evaluation of evidence. Nevertheless, during his teaching career he is remembered as strongly pushing an anti-science Christian fundamentalist agenda including creationism onto students, thereby alienating his teaching colleagues. While this is considered unacceptable in a UK state school, it is not the case in private Christian schools, and especially in the USA (where, amazingly, 20% of high school science teachers profess a belief in creationism). Below is a page extracted from a science textbook 'Science 4 Christian Schools' published by Bob Jones University, a for-profit 'educational' establishment:



The information provided to children in this textbook is, like the pterodactyl story, clear unadulterated bullshit. No-one has ever heard or felt electricity? One hopes that those children who continue to believe such nonsense do not choose a career as an electrician. Physics has long ascertained exactly what electricity is and what the sources of electricity are. There is no mystery or disagreement whatsoever. But what would you expect from a company that recently published a biology textbook for Christian primary schools which claims that the Loch Ness monster exists, is "*probably a plesiosaurus*", and this fact alone refutes the theory of evolution? Here's the quote:

"Some scientists speculate that Noah took small or baby dinosaurs on the Ark ... are dinosaurs still alive today? With some recent photographs and testimonies of those who claimed to have seen one, scientists are becoming more convinced of their existenceHave you heard of the 'Loch Ness Monster' in Scotland? 'Nessie,' for short, has been recorded on sonar from a small submarine, described by eyewitnesses, and photographed by others. Nessie appears to be a plesiosaur".

No, proper scientists do not speculate about Noah's Ark. And why on earth do they think dinosaurs surviving to the modern era would refute evolution? Don't they realise that modern bird species are descended from dinosaurs? Skeletal remains of human beings dated to, say, 75 million years ago might refute evolution, but we haven't found any and are not likely to. Finding modern day dinosaurs would in no way refute evolution. As of July 2013 this particular claim has been removed from science books used by Christian schools in the UK, following widespread mocking publicity (especially in the Scottish media), but not the USA. Some children with fundamentalist Christian parents are not only taught this sort of nonsense but are actually rewarded when they are able to regurgitate it when being assessed. The two images below, for example, are a typical test administered by the Blue Ridge Christian Academy in South Carolina, USA. The student who completed this test received a perfect score. This is not a parody; it is a verified copy of an actual science test. Yes, a science test.....

Name _____

100% A+

Date 3/28/13

4th grade Science Quiz:

Dinosaurs: Genesis and the Gospel



1. True or False The earth is billions of years old.
2. True or False Dinosaurs lived millions of years ago.
3. On what day did God make dinosaurs? 6th
4. True or False Dinosaurs lived with people.
5. What did people and animals eat in the beginning? plants
6. Which one fits the Behemoth described in Job 40? (Circle the picture.)



7. True or False If an animal has sharp teeth, it must mean it is a meat-eater.

11. Whom should we always trust? GOD!!!!

12. What is the "History Book of the Universe?" BIBLE!!!

13. What did God tell Noah to build? an ark

14. True or False? Noah's ark looked like this:



15. The average size of a dinosaur was a

- a. giraffe c. elephant
b. rhino d. sheep

16. What caused there to be fossils?

- a. lightning c. a tornado
b. a Global Flood d. evolution

17. Fossils are billions of dead things buried in rock layers by water all over the earth

18. The next time someone says the earth is billions (or millions) of years old, what can you say?

were you there

Unbelievably, parents actually pay for their children to be taught this stuff. I'd love to see their evidence that extinct species of dinosaur lived with people and of the four possible answers to Question 16 none are scientifically valid. Note the exclusive use of multiple choice, 'fill in the blank' and one or two word answers. This is a hallmark of fundamentalist Christian education. Students are actively discouraged from developing comprehensive arguments using empirical evidence and critical thinking and analysis in favour of regurgitating simplistic 'off-the shelf' answers and explanations of complex issues. After all, what's the point of teaching the physics behind the CERN Large Hadron Collider when we already have "*The History Book of the Universe*"? Below is a page from a biology test given to high school students in the UK in those schools employing the 'Accelerated Christian Education' teaching system. Note the less than subtle linking of Adolf Hitler with evolution and genetics in the first two questions. I examine in detail this fatuous myth, made almost exclusively by Christian fundamentalists, in my essay **The Myth that Darwin Influenced Hitler**.

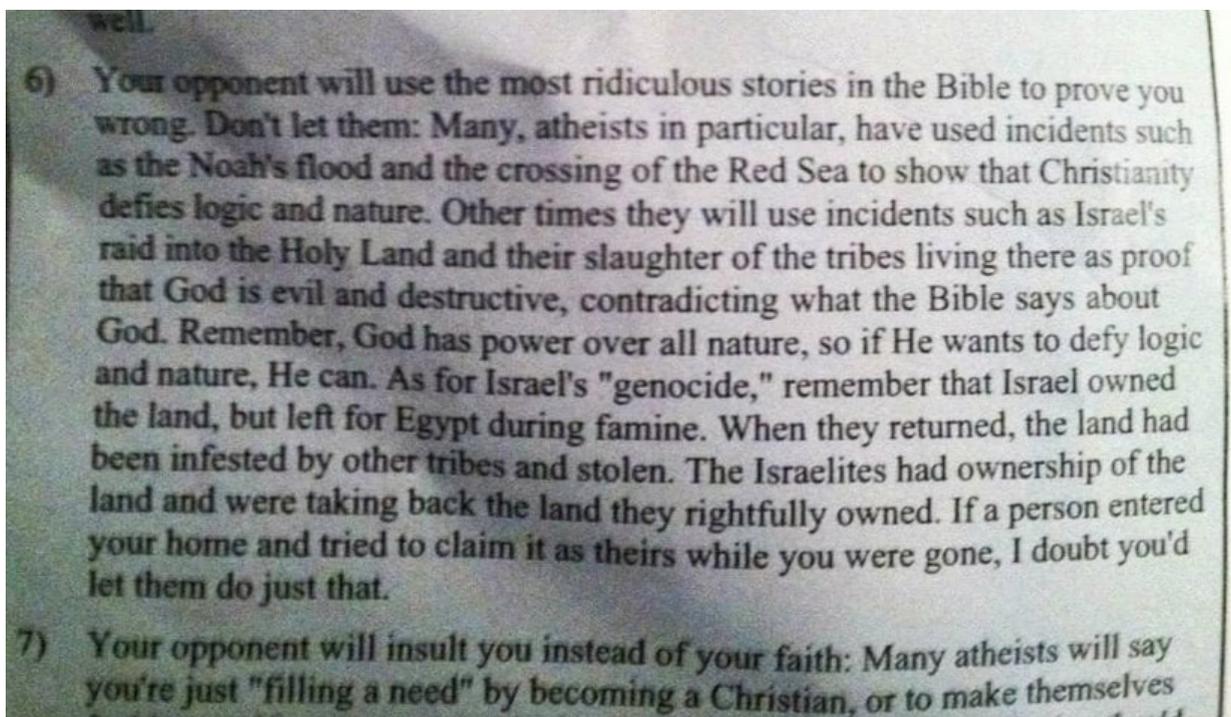
Biology 1107
Test
(each question, 2 points)

Underline the correct answer.

- (1) (Gregor Mendel, Adolf Hitler, Charles Darwin, Charles Mendel) formulated the theory of evolution.
- (2) (Gregor Mendel, Adolf Hitler, Charles Darwin, Charles Mendel) laid the foundation for the science of genetics.
- (3) (Embryology, Genetics, Cytology, Biology) is the study of inherited characteristics.
- (4) (Embryology, Genetics, Cytology, Biology) is the study of the development of unborn organisms.
- (5) A (phenotype, genotype, chromosome, hybrid) is an offspring of plants with different expressions of the same trait.
- (6) An organism's (phenotype, genotype, chromosome, hybrid) is its physical characteristic.
- (7) An organism's (phenotype, genotype, chromosome, hybrid) is its genetic make-up.
- (8) A (heterozygous, homozygous, dominant, recessive) characteristic is a hidden one.
- (9) A (heterozygous, homozygous, dominant, recessive) characteristic is one that is evident in the appearance of the organism.
- (10) A (heterozygous, homozygous, dominant, recessive) cell contains different alleles for a trait.
- (11) A (heterozygous, homozygous, dominant, recessive) cell contains identical alleles for a trait.

Accelerated Christian Education includes no secular books at all in the curriculum. Unbelievably, English literature classes contain no works of fiction. Instead, students study biographies of missionaries alongside anti-evolution books such as 'When Science Fails' and 'After the Flood: The Early Post-Flood History of Europe Traced Back to Noah' (the latter considered, of course, to be non-fiction). Modern history is taught exclusively in dichotomous terms as a battle for supremacy between absolute good and absolute evil, Biblical vs. non-Biblical values and conservative vs. liberal values but never are these "*thought terminating clichés.....brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases*" (as American psychiatrist Robert Lifton aptly terms them) explicitly defined and openly discussed. For example, one Accelerated Christian Education high school textbook teaching politics, goes by the title, 'Wisdom Pack: Sinners Need Big Government'. It is in the form of a comic book, and so quite comically groups together "*pornographers, drug pushers and other humanists*."

These poor students are simply indoctrinated, from an early age, into automatically applying such simplistic canards to all social issues. It is, of course, much easier to teach children to demonise opponents than to engage in informed, rational debate and people who have benefited from an adequate education ordinarily find it very difficult to converse with people educated to these low standards. Thus it becomes doubly difficult for the ideological wall to remain unbreached. Let's take a look at another example page from a 'textbook':



A number of things should ring alarm bell here. First, the ludicrous analogy between a tribal group who had occupied apparently empty land for 400 years with someone entering your home and claiming it as their own (as well as the oh-so-sweet irony that, by their own criterion, the Americas were "*infested*" by foreign peoples; using their own logic don't Native Americans have every right to take back the land they "*rightfully own*"?). I doubt very much whether any debate regarding that issue is encouraged in class. Second, note the overt racism and dehumanising in describing the land as having been "*infested by other tribes*". This sort of attitude should come as no surprise. Bob Jones University, one of the largest publishers of Christian home-schooling textbooks in the world, allowed no black people among its 5000 students until 1971 and only then because it risked losing access to federal government funds. It was their advertised policy not to accept black students on purely Biblical grounds. Even when it eventually did so the university saw fit to ban interracial relationships between students, on threat of expulsion, for another 28 years. Third, what about the embarrassing denial that the wholesale slaughter of men, women and children can be defined as genocide?

Fundamentalist Christian approaches to education are in no sense 'children-first' movements. They are primarily an ideologically-based education with pedagogical parallels to that used in despotic states such as North Korea. Like the North Koreans they are simply manufacturing children who will act as tools to proselytise their ideology. We should pity children who are subject to such facile indoctrination. How are they ever going to be able to make informed decisions when it comes to matters of public policy involving scientific and complex social issues? Not surprisingly research from the United States clearly shows that biblical fundamentalism and education make very poor bedfellows. Longitudinal studies show that biblical fundamentalism has a substantial negative effect on further educational attainment, especially so for girls. For example, there is compelling evidence that Christian fundamentalist students have smaller vocabularies than their non-fundamentalist Christian counterparts. Christian fundamentalists who do gain access to higher education are far more likely to choose private, overtly religious colleges and universities which offer substantially fewer course options, have no established research programs and are frequently unaccredited by education authorities and so unrecognised by the mainstream university and college community and employers. This choice is essentially due to a high level of paranoia. The starting point for fundamentalist Christians is not one of honest inquiry. Their basic premise is that they alone hold normative, correct beliefs. Those with views contrary to their own, including science, are seen to have an 'agenda' and forever attempting to 'indoctrinate' those with faith. In this regard, fundamentalists are essentially scared of evidence. They perceive that the best way to preserve their beliefs is not to have them challenged, but to hide the evidence from younger believers for as long as possible.

Eric Hovind's education was received entirely from the perspective of young earth creationism and biblical literalism; firstly at home, then at the non-state accredited Pensacola Christian Academy, followed by the unaccredited Jackson Hole Bible College and finally, at Baptist Tennessee Temple University. Eric Hovind's father, the creationist doyen 'Dr' Kent Hovind ("*the most colorful creationist at the bottom of the barrel*") received his PhD in 'Christian Education' in 1991 from the unaccredited (read 'diploma mill') 'Patriot Bible University' whose 'campus' is not much larger than an affluent suburban home. Actually Patriot Bible

University do claim accreditation - from a similarly bogus organisation calling themselves 'Accrediting Commission International', who are not recognised by the education departments of any US state.

Despite the longstanding convention of PhD theses being made freely available for anyone to inspect, Kent Hovind and Patriot Bible University had repeatedly denied requests to examine his thesis until Wikileaks made the thesis freely available on its website in 2009. It is not difficult to understand why they were so coy. Entitled 'The Effects of Teaching Evolution on the Students in our Public School System' Hovind's 'thesis' has become somewhat of an internet joke. Hovind Snr fails to properly address his subject matter in a document that is far too short to qualify for a PhD level dissertation and is replete with factual errors of the most basic kind. It boasts a quantity of spelling and grammatical errors way beyond what would be expected at this level of academia (including repeated mistakes in using the words 'there', 'their', and 'they're'). His opening sentences succinctly demonstrate the rigorous academic style expected of Patriot Bible University's graduate level students:

Hello, my name is Kent Hovind. I am a creation/science evangelist. I live in Pensacola, Florida. I have been a high school science teacher since 1976. I've been very active in the creation/evolution controversy for quite some time. As an evangelist, God has given me the

Not surprisingly, an analysis of Hovind's Snr's thesis reveals a 'Flesch Reading Ease' score of 69.44. An 11-year old demonstrating the expected level of literacy for their age would be expected to be able to write a work that scores somewhere between 60-70. A related measure, the 'Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level' is an indication of the amount of education required to effectively understand a document. Hovind's doctoral level thesis has been determined to be understandable to an average 7th grade student. Another academic convention is that a successful PhD thesis must expand knowledge in the subject with which it is dealing, i.e., it must add new data or else provide a novel interpretation of existing data. Not so for Patriot Bible University. They prefer to follow the Christian education convention of regurgitating simplistic 'off-the shelf' explanations of complex issues. Again, Hovind Snr. takes full advantage of such rigorous academic expectations:

I will be quick to point out that "there is nothing new under the sun." Most of my ideas are the result of the input of hundreds of Godly men and women through the years. I have attempted in this book to simply explain the things I have learned through many years of studying both science and the Bible.

infallible and flawless in every detail. If the Bible says that something was created a certain way, then that is just the way it happened. Now, as a science teacher, I want to keep an open mind and understand why, how, and when God

After attempting to establish his credentials as an objective science guy (though he is somewhat economical with the truth; he has never taught science in any state accredited school and from 1976-1989 he taught only in unaccredited church schools, one of which he had set up himself), Hovind Snr then proceeds to make his case based on a definition of evolution that would result in a fail for any biology student at a first year undergraduate level:

The idea that evolutionists try to get across today is that there is a continual upward progression. They claim that everything is getting better, improving, all by itself as if there is an inner-drive toward more perfection and order. This is totally opposite of the first and

To cap it all off there is no reference section or bibliography of any kind. That's right, a successful PhD thesis lacking a reference section! In fact there are no citations at all in the first nine pages that aren't from the Bible (and you have to count these pages yourself - Patriot Bible University apparently don't require theses to have page numbers). The quality of historical analysis is, likewise, positively childlike despite the author then being 38-years old:

"All of the ancient writings we have show a young age of the earth. Why don't we have people writing about kings that lived fifty thousand years ago? Why is it that all of recorded history happened in the last four thousand years?"

"For instance, Communism is a direct offshoot of evolution."

Really? Perhaps because written language hadn't been invented before four thousand years ago? And, note the reversal of the timeline? Hovind doesn't mean the concept of evolution in general. He clearly intends to foster hatred for Darwin; yet Marx published his 'Communist Manifesto' almost a decade before Darwin had published anything at all on evolution. And these are the very people who want to be tasked with teaching science and history in state schools?.....

Children are currently safe from Kent Hovind, however. He is currently Federal Prisoner Register #06452-017 [since released], serving 10 years for 12 tax fraud offenses, one count of obstructing federal agents, and 45 counts of illegally structuring cash transactions. Specifically he failed to pay \$845,000 in income, Social Security and Medicare taxes for his employees at the Creation Science Ministry, trading as 'Dinosaur Adventure Land' arguing that they were "*missionaries employed by God*" which made them independent contractors. Even after being sentenced he had dutiful son Eric conceal property deeds and vehicle titles to prevent their seizure as payment for his debts. Although he now has several appeals under his belt, all of which he has lost, he is currently threatening to sue for defamation those who claim that he has been convicted of fraud on the basis that "*The government was wrong in my case..... being convicted by one person does not prove guilt.*" Furthermore, in the most distasteful manner imaginable he has actually likened his incarceration to the sufferings of holocaust victims:

"Six million Jews were convicted and executed in Germany in WW II. Does that prove they were guilty of some crime?.....the lower court ruled against me just as Jesus's enemies rejoiced when he was convicted and sentenced."

He has even claimed, via his lawyer, that the the US government does not have the legal right to try him because he does not come under their jurisdiction, citing an obscure legal concept of 'subornation of false muster'. This is really scraping the bottom of a very deep and dirty fundamentalist Christian barrel. In effect, this defence argues that because he is firstly a citizen of God and not the USA, he is not obliged to follow the laws of the state and if he does so he has been effectively sequestered into a group to which he cannot legally belong (i.e., taxpayers) and as such is being induced to do something unlawful! Despite such a novel defence, however, he seems to have had no problem availing himself of taxpayer funded legal counsel. (Note: he has been released since this was written).

Not to be outdone in the con-artist game, in March 2013 Eric Hovind posted a video on Facebook asking for 5,000 people to donate \$10 a month for the next year so as he can continue the good work his father has now been prevented from doing. This amounts to \$600,000 per year. Shortly afterward on his website he increased the requested donation to \$20 a month. Eric's brother Chad is another fine chip off the Hovind block. He's behind an outfit called God Quest Inc. that pushes the Christian philosophy of 'Godonomic\$' (yes, that dollar sign on the end really is part of the logo) which purports to present God's wish for free market enterprise and his wisdom on work and money (and creationism) in a pack of 6 DVDs for only \$377.80. Ironically, they supply these DVDs and other assorted Christian fundamentalist literature to federal prisons under a government grant. Good to know Kent had some suitable material to watch during his incarceration.

The target audience of the programs such as the Creation Today Show is a particularly scientifically-illiterate and gullible demographic. They have been primed to be susceptible to believe utterly incredulous and patently dishonest statements by supposedly authoritative people like Paul Taylor and Eric and Kent Hovind. Taylor typically talks to church groups and his modus operandi is to plant seeds of doubt about the veracity of science. As he has written:

"Scientific models, while helpful, must never take the place of scripture. The scientific model can be superseded. Scripture cannot."

Thus, people like Eric Hovind and Paul Taylor argue from belief, not reason. Any arguments that address their beliefs are measured not in terms of evidence, or reasonableness, or even honesty, but simply to the degree to which they agree with their beliefs. Thus they have no need or reason to understand any field of study not based on scripture. It is a profoundly dishonest position.

Pterodactyls in 17th century Cardiff.....for Christ's sake!

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