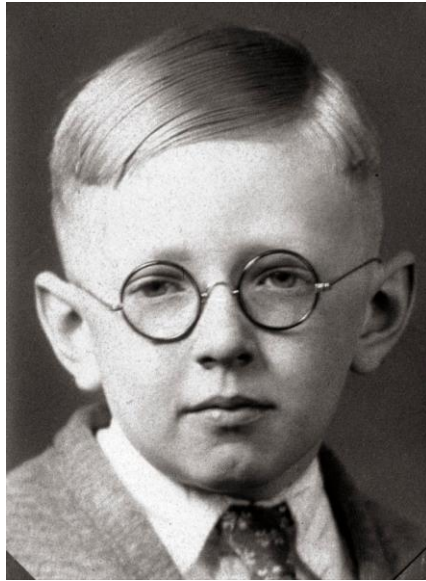


The Earth Is Not a Spinning Ball,
Charlie Brown!

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CHARLES M. Schulz remembered a time when the Earth was flat. Not very fondly—and I’ll explain why in a moment. But in the early decades of his monumental fifty-year run drawing *Peanuts* for the Newspapers, its memory certainly hadn’t escaped him. The flat earth was still ever-present on the conscious backburner of many a-mind when Schulz premiered his strip in 1950. That has been my conclusion, at any rate, and I intend to use Charlie Brown to show it. *Mm-hmm*, the block head. Charlie Brown. Poor Charlie Brown. You know how Lucy tricked him every year into pursuing the ball but then pulled it away at the last possible second? AAUGH! This is like that. He was dupped again. Nearly everyone was. The earth is flat, and Charles M. Schulz played his part as a willing propagandist for NASA’s moon landing deception.

The evangelist **Wilbur Glenn Voliva** and his religious band of rebelrousing flat earthists likely had a part to play in the bad aftertaste. So successful were Voliva’s attacks on the space ball mythos, using the Bible and nationwide radio as his platform, that he even got *spook* **George Orwell** to openly address the possibility in his own newspaper column. But that was another generation. The Zetetics of the last century

were a dying breed, certainly not Schulz's spokespersons. *Whack-jobs* like Voliva and the last remaining Biblical literalists who'd given him a podium had already faded into the oblivion of America's Great Depression. Schulz was a veteran of the War. Under the flag of victory, the entire world's landscape had been changed—including its outlook. His was the "space age." And like so many of his generation, born into households of Christendom—including the baby-boomers whom they raised—Charles

The Rise and Fall of Man



The New Yorker, June 6, 1925

M. Schulz would die a secular humanist.

At the turn of the twentieth century the gloves came off. Scientism went to Total War. For men like Voliva and **William Jennings Bryan**, theirs was a last-ditch effort; and for anyone who decided to join them in the trenches by clinging to a literal interpretation of Scripture, the bombardments were nothing short of shock-and-awe. Western philosophy and secular humanism were pulverizing them. The situation was not helped by the fact that Bryan was an obvious Establishment spook. Spokesperson for the *globular* creationists all the same, chosen as part of the Media narrative to beat down and humiliate anyone who dared to oppose Academia's *evolving* narrative in the Scopes Monkey Trial.

Not long after, Voliva and his ministry succumbed to financial bankruptcy and controversy. By the 1950's, Bryan and Voliva were dead, and their last remaining loyal followers, who had dominated dinner-table conversations only two decades earlier, were few enough in number to be forgotten—or too old to be remembered. That was the plan all along.



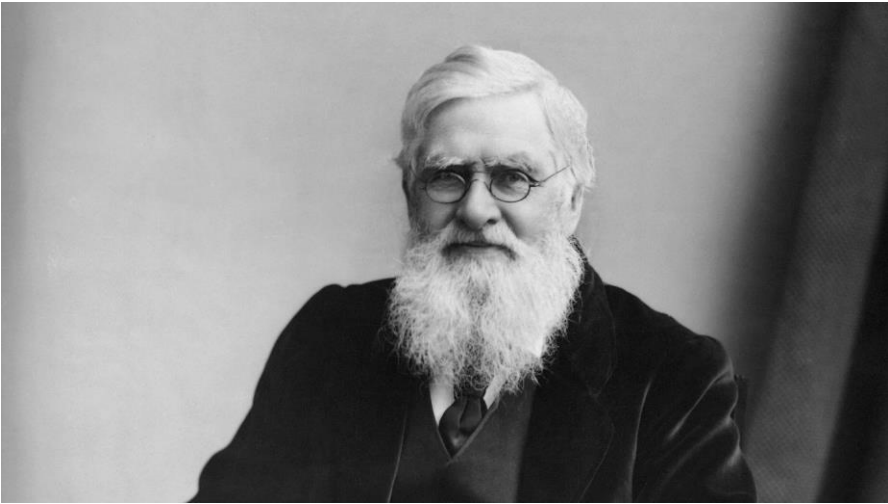
It may be safe to say that the flat earth *Movement*, if such a term should be accredited with geocentricism, officially began nearly a century earlier when, in the summer of 1838, seven years *after* **Charles Darwin** set off with Captain Robert Fitzroy for the Galapagos Islands, when the Englishman **Samuel Rowbotham** waded into the old Bedford Canal. With a telescope positioned 8 inches above its surface, Rowbotham watched a boat mounting a red flag positioned three feet above the water row unhindered from his view until it finally reached Welney Bridge—the approximate and total length of Bedford’s six miles. A globular earth, Rowbotham maintained, should have buried the top of the mast 11 feet below his line of sight. Rowbotham repeated his experiments several times over the years. His observations would be published in 1849 and subsequently expanded into a book, *Earth Not a Globe*, in 1865. But once again, it arrived several years too late. Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* landed on shelves five years earlier.

The year was 1870, and Zetetic supporter **John Hampden**, a Protestant rector’s son and recent Oxford drop out, began publishing various tracts demanding that the Church of England be reformed “on strict Protestant lines” in order that Genesis might be defended with literal accuracy. Hampden’s initial influence, **William Carpenter**, had been convinced that the earth was flat through one of Rowbotham’s speeches. Carpenter’s book, *Theoretical Astronomy Examined and Exposed*, had hoped to injure the growing scientific establishment rather than receive the intellectual snubbing that it did. Hampden therefore had an idea. He offered a wager which hoped to repeat Rowbotham’s experiment, proving that the earth was indeed flat. The January 12th issue of *Scientific Opinion*, a weekly journal, records Hampden’s qualm.

“What is to be said of the pretended philosophy of the 19th century, when not one educated man in ten thousand knows the shape of the earth on which he dwells? Why, it must be a huge sham! The undersigned is willing to deposit from £50 to £500, on reciprocal terms, and defies

all the philosophers, divines and scientific professors in the United Kingdom to prove the rotundity and revolution of the world from Scripture, from reason, or from fact. He will acknowledge that he has forfeited his deposit, if his opponent can exhibit, to the satisfaction of any intelligent referee, a convex railway, river, canal, or lake.”

—JOHN HAMPDEN



Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913)

Alfred Russel Wallace read the ad. Wallace was best known for independently conceiving the theory of evolution through natural selection, even jointly publishing his own work alongside contemporary Charles Darwin, which in turn prompted Darwin to ultimately send *On the Origin of Species* to the ink printer. At any rate, the bait was dangled, and Wallace tugged on the line—but not before first consulting his friend, **Sir Charles Lyell**, inventor of the geological column, asking whether he thought the challenge should be broached.

Lyell replied: “Certainly. It may stop these foolish people to have it plainly shown them.”

Wallace accepted the wager.

Rather than simply positioning a mobile target three feet above the surface, as Hampden had intended, Wallace set a line of sight 13 feet high in order to reduce the effects of atmospheric refraction and then added a pole halfway down the six-mile canal in order that a “hump” could be detected on the curvature of the earth. Hampden initially refused the demonstration. Wallace however succeeded. He detected a hump. Evolution was spared. After the Darwinist was awarded the bet by their mediator, editor of *The Field* sports magazine, Hampden subsequently distributed a pamphlet alleging foul play. Wallace *had cheated*, he said. And to prove that point, Hampden took him to court.

Though the court ultimately ruled that the wager had been invalid to begin with, the flat earthist was imprisoned for libel and furthermore threatening to kill a Darwinian. Speaking of which, for his injudicious involvement in a bet to “decide the most fundamental and established of scientific facts,” Wallace was criticized by Darwin’s contemporaries to no end. Until his dying days, the Bedford Level, Wallace maintained, was the foremost regret of his life.

He later wrote:

“The next matter was a much more serious one, and cost me fifteen years of continued worry, litigation, and persecution, with the final loss of several hundred pounds. And it was all brought upon me by my own ignorance and my own fault—ignorance of the fact so well shown by the late Professor de Morgan—that ‘*paradoxers*,’ as he termed them, can never be convinced, and my fault in wishing to get money by any kind of wager. It constitutes, therefore, the most regrettable incident in my life.”

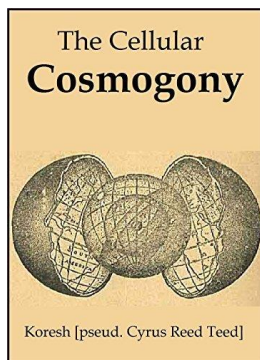
Decades before Wallace’s involvement and even afterward, the Bedford Canal became a rallying cry of Biblical literalism, particularly in England. As the 19th century closed, **Lady Elizabeth Anne Blount** carried on Rowbotham’s work in founding the Universal Zetetic Society. Her wealth and social status allowed access to England’s prominent citizens, and *The Earth (Not a Globe) Review*, which not only matched Scripture with scientific observation, further advocated vegetarianism and anti-vivisectionist views. On the 11th of May 1904, Lady Blount revisited

the Bedford Canal by hiring a commercial photographer and globe supporter in **Edgar Clifton**, with hopes of dashing Wallace's evolutionary earth to pieces. To do so, Blount dropped a large white sheet at Rowbotham's original starting position (some 70 years earlier) in order that the photographer, using a telephoto lens camera mounted two feet above the water, might capture its bottom edge from Welney Bridge, six miles away, which he did—spectacularly. He saw it all.

Clifton was stumped.

The Darwinists simply ignored the Zetetics. Perhaps because Henry Yule Oldham, a senior academic in geography at King's College, Cambridge, had already reproduced Wallace's results in 1901 using three poles fixed at equal height above water level. So contemptuous were the Darwinists towards Rowbotham's little Level experiment and John Hampden's wager that Bedford was taught in schools as *proof* of the Earth's curvature. For the following half century, until the space race could produce photos, generations of children were raised worldwide to learn that the earth was provably a globe because the Darwinists had conquered the Copernican revolution by defeating flat earthists.

It was the perfect propaganda.



Elsewhere in the world, **Ulysses Gran Morrow**, a newspaper editor, replicated a similar experiment on the old Drainage Canal in Summit, Illinois. The date was July 25, 1896. In doing so, Morrow *also* attempted to prove the earth was spherical—but there was a catch. Morrow was sponsored by a man named **Cyrus Reed Teed**, an eclectic physician and alchemist who had by now claimed divine inspiration and a messianic

anointing, even going so far as to adopt the name Koresh. Together they hoped to prove the earth was concave.

Koresh called it *Koreshanity*.

Fundamentally, Koreshanity posited that the earth and sky, the sun, moon, and stars exist *inside* the surface of a sphere—essentially globe earth inverted. Though Koresh initially found some success in San Francisco, he eventually proposed a New Jerusalem in the 320-acre plot of Estero, Florida, 15 miles south of Fort Myers. His newfound paradise was incorporated on September 1, 1904. Like Jim Jones several decades after him, his followers came in droves.

In the suburbs of Chicago, Wilbur Glenn Voliva heard about it, and wanted a New Jerusalem of his own.

By 1907, **Alexander John Dowie**, the man who had claimed to be Elijah was dead. Upon his request, Dowie's grave was filled with concrete, once his coffin was secured inside, in order to stave off any potential rumor that his body had been stolen—that is, in the event of *resurrection*, a rumor in which Dowie started. Was Wilbur Glenn Voliva concerned? Not likely. Despite once being billed as his most loyal follower, Voliva had successfully wrestled the grand Utopian vision from the theocrat who'd envisioned it, with a slanderous shock and awe press campaign to follow. Finally, Dowie was gone forever—good riddance. Zion City was *his* now. One tyrant was traded in for another.

Meanwhile, back in Florida, Koresh's death in 1908 proved a serious *bummer* to convex earth, particularly since the self-anointed Messiah claimed to be immortal. As you probably guessed, neither he nor Dowie resurrected.



Throughout the following four decades Voliva would successfully rule over one of the most reviled and yet simultaneously awe-inspiring churches *and communities* of the twentieth century. The rigid rules and regulations enforced upon Zion's citizens became a legendary roadmap for Prohibition to come. It was there in Zion, the land of Dowie's grand design, that the flat earth movement would take its next grandstand. Though Voliva had once accused Dowie of "extravagance, hypocrisy, misrepresentations, exaggerations, misuse of investments, tyranny, and injustice" in order to douse his leadership credibility, by the end of the First World War, Voliva began painting himself in even broader strokes by billing himself "The World's Richest Holy Man."

The world took notice.

On Sunday, June 4, 1922, from a *Washington Times* column titled: "HEARD AND SEEN: A Column FOR and FROM Everybody," the following question is asked of columnist Bill Price.

IS THE EARTH FLAT?

Dear Bill:



We are taught that the earth is round. We have no way of knowing except to follow what the scientists say. So far as my mundane affairs are concerned it makes no difference. But I'm getting all balled up about the whole thing. Between reading the declarations of WILBUR VOLIVA, of Zion City, that the earth is positively flat, and W. J. BRYAN that we are not descended from apes, I don't know where I stand. Voliva quotes the Bible to show that the Earth is flat and Bryan relies upon it to prove that Darwin was imbued with imagination.

Can't we settle this thing in the Old Column, the only real forum the people have? Just suppose the earth is flat after all. What are we going to do about it? The thing ought to be settled.

There are thousands of cake-eaters and flappers all over the World who are living their sweet lives under the impression that the earth is round. If they are being deceived it's terrible, that's all. They should know the real truth. Are there not among your contributors many bright minds who will tell us just what the flappers do think on this subject?

—PROF X.



Earlier that year, *The Washington Times* ran a far less flattering story. On Friday, January 27, 1922, columnist Arthur Brisbane, clearly not a fan of Flat Earth, Voliva, or the Bible, wrote:

“Mr. Voliva, the ‘prophet’ of Zion City, says the earth is not round, but flat. Thus, Zion City’s children are taught.

There is more in that than mere stupidity, refusing plain truth that patience might make dear to a chimpanzee. Mr. Voliva knows his people, knows that they accept his mental trash because it is more easily swallowed than hard fact. Kroger, of the Transvaal, also said the earth was flat. That’s one reason why the English got him and his land. Superstition loses its fights in these days.

From Voliva you learn how strongly men cling to old falsehood, how they hate new truth.

Every really great inventor, statesman, and thinker has known how men cling to original error and even invent new brands of “error” to escape unpleasant thought. Thinking, to the average man, is like standing on its hind legs to a dog—possible, but unpleasant. Both become impossible as dog and man get old.”

Even **George Orwell**, author of *Animal Farm* and *1984*, chimed in on the conversation. On the 27th of December 1946, as part of his “*As I Please*” column, the author wrote a piece titled: “*How Do You Know the Earth is Round?*” He began his article by stating:

“Bernard Shaw remarks that we are more gullible and superstitious today than we were in the Middle Ages, and as an example of modern credulity he cites the widespread belief that the earth is round. The average man, says Shaw, can advance not a single reason for thinking that the earth is round. He merely swallows this theory because there is something about it that appeals to the twentieth-century mentality.”

The battle for the flat earth was *real*. This was the world which parented Charles Schulz and his generation. Schulz however would father another. By the time Linus, Lucy, Schroeder, Charlie Brown, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, Franklin, Pigpen, Snoopy and their fellow baby-boomers were

born, the outcome was almost certain. Within twenty years of their conception, the space race would achieve its ultimate mission. Not only was the Soviet Union to be humiliated—the Bible was too. That’s two birds with one stone. The appeal of “twentieth-century mentality,” as Orwell put it, contrasted with the Bible’s “mental trash,” to quote Brisbane, particularly from those clinging to its “old falsehood,” did not win the day.



CHARLIE BROWN first learned about *planet* Earth as most of us did—in the classroom. The date was October 27, 1950, only three weeks after *Peanuts* first premiered, and Sherm’s claim that a schoolroom globe is “proof” of its spherical nature did not pass by Brown without an initial air of skepticism. How interesting since, by his own testimony, flat earthist **Charles Kenneth Johnson** was introduced to the Copernican revolution through the same method. The schoolroom globe.

Born on his father’s cattle ranch in Tennyson, Texas, on July 24, 1924, only two years after Schulz, Johnson would never forget the day when, in the second or third grade, his teacher introduced them to *the very thing*.

“Now they brought out this globe,” he later recalled. “It wasn’t like today, they didn’t have globes everywhere, and people didn’t say globe every few minutes. They put out this globe and started the propaganda on it. I didn’t accept it from the start. You can see the thing is false! It’s quite obvious. I can see it today the same as I saw it there.”

A ball with water on it—and the water just hangs there? The eight-year-old thought to himself. *Why don’t ships sail right over the edge and fall off?*



Charles *and* Marjory Johnson in Lancaster, California, 1970's

He then spoke his doubts out loud. *Not good.* His teacher immediately and publicly rebuffed the boys' concerns. But Charles insisted. *Mam, this is a sham.* The boy was sent home from school with an added homework assignment. Again, recounting that day, Johnson was to fetch a bucket, fill it with water, swing it round and observe the centrifugal force which held the water in place, as Newtonian laws of motion implied.

Here Johnson further recalled: "I got a bucket of water and I whirled it around. It didn't come out, but I saw at the same time that it had nothing to do with the globe. This was absurd. So, I knew there was a lie here. Maybe I was extra smart or extra something for my age. I see other things they told us in school weren't true. But that was the big one. I knew it and I've always known it. It's a complete world of lies, telling you things they know when they really don't know it. I always knew that the Earth was not a ball. I pondered for a while about how I could prove otherwise, but I didn't want to spend any time dwelling on it. I just knew that the Earth was flat."

By May 11, 1957, some seven years after Charlie Brown's initial introduction to the globe, Brown was thoroughly indoctrinated—though apparently glum about it, as one would expect of America's favorite blockhead. Lucy however had not passed the exam, because the thought

of an Earth “spinning through space” was laughable at best—and reserved for one’s wildest imaginations.



“People come and people go, but the Earth keeps on spinning,” says Charlie Brown.

“Spinning?” Lucy asks from behind a stone wall. “What do you mean, spinning?”

“Spinning through space....” Charlie brown explains. “The Earth keeps on spinning through space.”

Lucy explodes into laughter: “Oh, my, Charlie Brown! You may not be the brightest person in the world, but you sure have some imagination!”

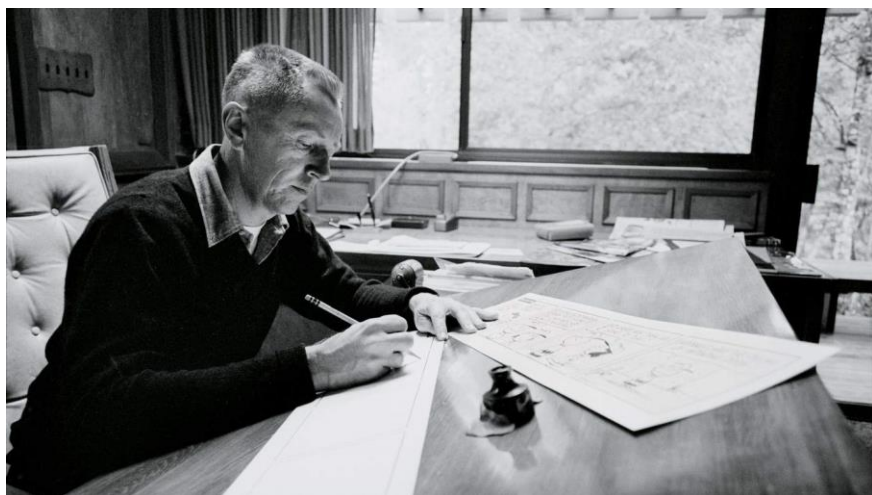
“Good grief!”

Contrarily, Charles Johnson was *never* convinced. While his schoolmates learned about the globe and then fleshed out what imaginations a globular Earth offered on the playground, Johnson poured through library books,

searching knowledge, *desperately* seeking answers—all the while striving to withstand the monotonous persuasions of his school regime. It was there in the library where he acquainted himself with Freud, Einstein, and Dickens on his own. As a pubescent, Johnson later quipped that he'd already acquired more knowledge than the average University graduate. And then one day the young Johnson happened upon an article in *Harper's Magazine* concerning Zion, Illinois' overseer, Wilbur Glenn Voliva.

Johnson recalls: "I knew in a split second, when I read in Harper's Magazine, just check the water. I said, 'My God! Why didn't I think of that?' I vowed that the minute I'd get to a lake, I'd check it. I knew from that second then how to prove it."

The boy wrote Voliva a letter. The ailing Voliva responded, and then he died. And just like that, the flat earth was *seemingly* buried right alongside its rebel rousing champion—six feet under. With the outbreak of the Second World War, particularly the atomic age to follow, flat earth was an embarrassment to almost everyone involved, including Voliva's own Utopian hopefuls. Charles Johnson would have to wait nearly another two decades before a certain **Samuel Shenton** of Dover, England, would take up the fight alone.



THERE'S a reason why *Peanuts* reverberated so well with the adult crowd. Especially college students. Beatniks, hipsters, and eventually, as the

sixties progressed, with hippies. In 1957, adults would have *gotten* the joke. But perhaps more importantly, they would have had a sort-of first-hand appreciation for it. They were laughing at their superstitious grandparents, and maybe even their crazy uncles. Schulz said it like this: “I feel that Peanuts reflects certain attitudes of life in our country today and perhaps some basic fears.” For most Cold War-era Americans, the very idea of a flat and motionless realm exhumed all the bad tastes associated with the food poisoning from a past memory—proof of religious zealotry gone tragically wrong.

Lucy Van Pelt came with a fist, and she could even pound it into the creative gut of Schulz himself. She was crabby, authoritatively bossy, judgmental, at times sadistic (when a football was involved), a top-notch fuss budget, and for all her attempts at leading Charlie Brown through psychological therapy (which may have *also* included the football—now that I think on it), stunningly arrogant.



Consider one of Schulz’s most enduring strips. On September 19, 1966, Snoopy’s house burned to the ground. Lucy’s response can best be summed up in *everything* that Schulz likely saw wrong with Christian fundamentalism. While the cause of the fire was never revealed, for Lucy, the conclusion came easy. Snoopy, she said, had *sinned*.

To blindly call Schulz a “Christian apologist” or evangelical spokesman is to brown-nose his strip with *wishful thinking*. In part, he curbed his own contemplations with the changing moralities of his time.



Schulz's most morbid view of religion comes, I believe, with Lucy's younger brother—the serial Scripture-memorizer, Linus Van Pelt. His undying devotion to the Great Pumpkin is nearly as unbearable to watch as Charlie Brown's blind faith in Lucy as a therapist.



And yet here is another account of *Peanuts* lasting power; Schulz's clever ability to pander to *everyone*. In June of 1963, the Supreme Court ruled 8–1 in favor of **Edward Schempp**, thereby declaring school-sponsored Bible reading in public schools in the United States to be unconstitutional. Schulz followed that decision on November 3, 1963, with one of *Peanuts* most nostalgic and hotly debated moments.

After making sure the *coast is clear*, Sally beckons her brother Charlie Brown to follow her behind the couch so that she can whisper into his ear: “We prayed in school today.”

Charlie brown is aghast.

Sally’s confession masterfully played to the emotions of both sides, and not only proved a rallying cry for Christian groups across America, who cried *foul* at the Supreme Court’s decision; it doubled down as a banner for Thomas Payne fanboys too. Everyone it seems *concurred* with Sally.



As Schulz faith slipped through the very fingertips which so devoutly held his creative pen and outlined his sketches for five-consecutive decades, he asked his readers to do the same. In a January 1986 strip, Sally asked Charlie Brown: “When we die, will we go to Heaven?”

Charlie Brown’s response was: “I like to *think* so.”

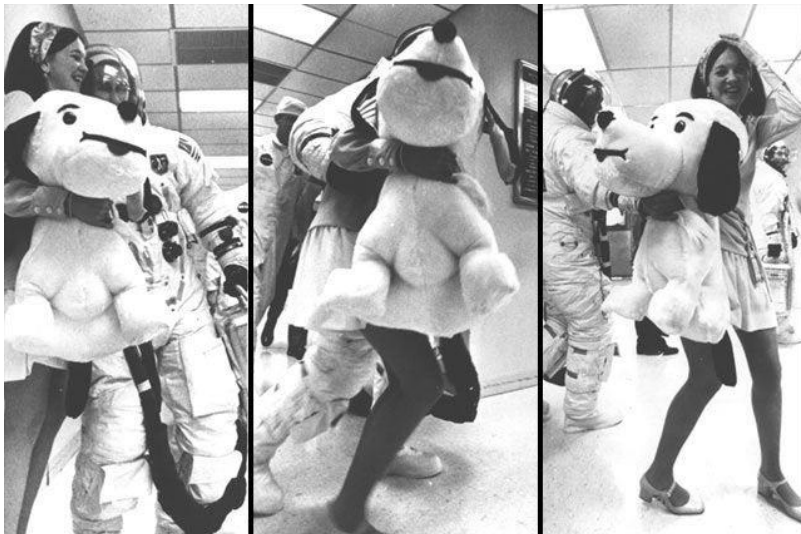


In the sunset of his life, the so-called spokesman for Christianity confessed: “I do not go to church anymore. I guess you could say I’ve come around to secular humanism, an obligation I believe all humans have to others and the world we live in.” Perhaps it was the Camelot era space race which he so eagerly attached his characters to. Or maybe Charles Schulz was simply a mugging victim of The Sixties, you tell me. But if you’re paying attention, Linus lost the war. The Bible no longer held credibility as the final authority in the life of Charles Schulz or the American continent which his strips represented.

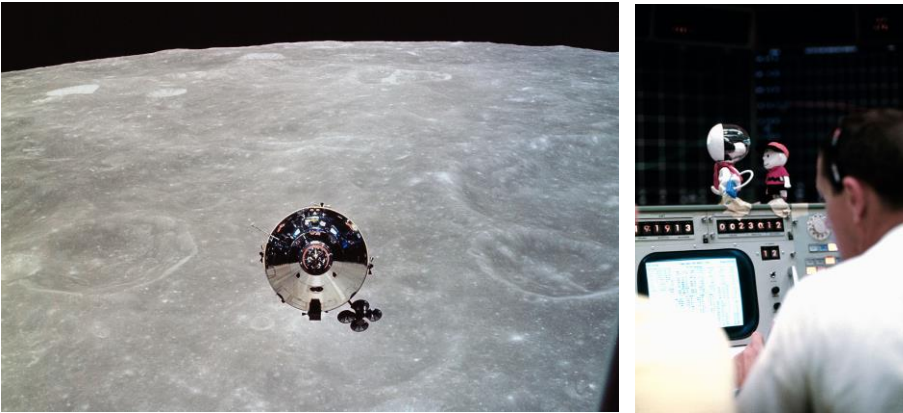


WE ARE told their partnership began sometime in The Sixties when NASA sought permission to use Snoopy on their spaceflight safety materials. Charles M. Schulz apparently asked for nothing monetary in return—a brilliant business decision. Their collaboration then continued in 1968 with the introduction of the Silver Snoopy award, given to the agency’s employees and contractors who made outstanding achievements in the areas of safety and mission success in spaceflight. Aside from the

obvious, that children were being indoctrinated into a fictional Cold War narrative using a puppy, NASA's association with a comic strip seems strange indeed. Their partnership reached *new heights* in 1969 when NASA sent Peanuts into space, naming the Apollo 10 command and lunar modules ... (are you ready for this?) ... "Charlie Brown" and "Snoopy." A far likelier scenario is that Charles M. Schulz was initiated.



Snoopy's involvement with NASA was further cemented in the national consciousness when Apollo 10 Commander **Tom Stafford** was photographed, in route to the launch pad no less, patting the nose of a stuffed Snoopy, held by **Jamye Flowers (Coplin)**, astronaut **Gordon Cooper's** secretary. Within seconds, astronaut **Gene Cernan** swooped both Snoopy and Flowers into his arms, as if to carry the two of them together into the elevator and to the moon and back. *Simply adorable.* If that didn't sell Peanuts merchandise, then I'm at a total loss of what would.



Within the matter of days, we are *then* told the module Snoopy was flown to within 14.5 kilometers of the moon's lunar surface. But before doing so, Tom Stafford would gaze back upon the earth, apparently in front of a live television audience, and quip to Houston:

“Think you could call over to London and tell the president of the Flat Earth Society that he's wrong?”

Well, *well*, well. Looks like the flat earth was *still* a thing of consciousness in 1969 after all. I'm starting to get the idea that NASA had something *to prove*. Best to use the television then, I guess. The talent behind the Flat Earth Society was **Samuel Shenton**, by the way. Not to be confused with the spooks running the Flat Earth Society today. Tell me, why would an old man's efforts behind a typewriter trouble a multi-billion-dollar federal executive agency, overseen by the President of the United States? It's the

little details. Also, I *checked*. Stafford was a **Freemason**. But are you surprised?



At any rate, in October of 1950, the mere fact that a classroom globe could be used as proof of a proposed spherical Earth—and made to be a joke—was a confessional in and of itself that Schulz had at least been in on the table-talk. By 1957, he'd passed it off as a gross and arrogant error of fundamentalism. In March of 1969, Snoopy beat not only Apollo 11 and the Russians to the moon, but “the stupid cat next door.”

Who needed the globe for indoctrination in the 1980's? With “*This Is America, Charlie Brown!*” a series of made-for-TV episodes which gave aide to American patriotism, the *Peanuts* journeyed aboard the International Space Station. And during the last decade of his life, the very notion of Evangelist Wilbur Glenn Voliva’s claim—that the Bible was *literally* true, and the Earth was flat—was a disposable joke.



Woodstock, we come to find out, is a flat earthist. *This* according to Snoopy’s brother, Andy. It is October 17th, 1997, and Schulz casts the

same grin of mockery that so many seem to possess the moment they find out that the golden canary and Biblical literalists have something in common. You know, “Why don’t you do us all a favor and jump off the edge of the Earth?” Olaf, being Snoopy’s fat, dopey, and rather gullible brother, does *just that*.