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The Bible and Creationism

Susan Trollinger and William Vance Trollinger, Jr.

To understate the case, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) marked a significant challenge to traditional understandings of the Bible and Christian theology. Darwin's theory of organic evolution stood in sharp contrast with the Genesis account of creation, with its six days, separate creations of life forms, and special creation of human beings. More than this, Darwin's ideas raised enormous theological questions about God's role in creation (e.g., is there a role for God in organic evolution?) and about the nature of human beings (e.g., what does it mean to talk about original sin without a historic Adam and Eve?)

Of course, what really made Darwin so challenging was that by the late nineteenth century his theory of organic evolution was the scientific consensus. That is to say, American Protestants had no choice but to reckon with Darwinism. For many Protestant intellectuals, clergy, and laypersons, this was not an enormous obstacle. That is, and in keeping with previous Christian responses to scientific developments, many Protestants adjusted their understanding of the Bible and their theology to accommodate Darwin's ideas.

But a significant minority of late nineteenth-century American Protestants responded quite negatively to Darwin, and would not or could not adjust their understanding of the Bible and its authority to fit the theory of organic evolution.¹ They were bolstered in their resistance by the doctrine of inerrancy. Inerrancy was developed in the late nineteenth century by Princeton theologians in response to the advent of historicism (or, higher criticism), which – in its determination to examine the Bible as any other historical text would be examined – raised

questions about the errors and inconsistencies in the text and highlighted the ways in which aspects of the biblical narrative seemed to involve borrowings from other cultures. In contrast, inerrancy emphasized that the original biblical “autographs” are the infallible, errorless product of the Holy Spirit’s guidance. While the texts and translations that we have may have a few errors, they are, so it is claimed, so few and so minor that we can trust the Bible that we have as the Word of God. As such, the Bible is factually accurate in all that it has to say, including when it speaks on history and science.²

Of course, inerrancy would not mean much if we the readers could not understand what the inerrant text is saying. That is to say, central to inerrancy is the notion that we are to read the Bible plainly, commonsensically, “literally.” It bears noting here that – despite all the rhetoric to the contrary – there is no such thing as one and only one literal reading of the Bible. Despite persistent and even frantic efforts by various biblical inerrantists to freeze the interpretation of the biblical text and claim that they have come up with the One True Reading of the text, they have not been able to change the fact that there is and will always be a plethora of plain, commonsensical, literal readings of the Bible.³

While it is thus certainly possible to imagine an inerrant Bible that is amenable to Darwinism, most late nineteenth-century Protestants who held to inerrancy could see no way to square the theory of organic evolution with the first few chapters of Genesis. Interestingly, however, the idea of an old Earth did not pose a problem for these conservative Protestants. This was in good part because the work of squaring a literal reading of Genesis 1 with the notion of an ancient Earth had already been done for them. In the centuries prior to Charles Darwin there was overwhelming confidence that the findings of modern science did and would square with the biblical text. As Jon Roberts has observed, “Protestant intellectuals . . . conceded that the

conclusions of science sometimes seemed to clash with the Scriptures, but they managed to devise a number of formulas that accommodated the meaning and truth of the Bible to the results of scientific investigation.”⁴ So when it became clear – in the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century – that the Earth was millions of years old, Protestant thinkers instinctively developed ways of reading Genesis 1 to fit this scientific consensus. Two approaches proved to be the most popular: Thomas Chalmers’ “gap theory” and Hugh Miller’s “day-age theory.”

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847) was an evangelical Scottish minister, a significant figure in the Church of Scotland and leader of the Free Church of Scotland movement, and a professor of moral philosophy at St. Andrews University (1823-1828) and then professor of theology at the University of Edinburgh (1828-1843). While a minister in his twenties and thirties, Chalmers delivered various lectures – at St. Andrews and the communities where he was pastoring – in mathematics and the sciences. It was in those years that he advanced his gap theory, which reconciled Genesis 1 with the antiquity of the Earth. As Michael Roberts has ably argued in “Genesis and Geological Time,” Chalmers’ gap theory is best understood not as a radical departure from established biblical interpretation, but instead as a modification of the chaos-restitution approach to Genesis 1 first articulated by Hugo Grotius and Marin Mersenne in the seventeenth century. In the traditional chaos-restitution exegesis, Genesis 1:1-2 describes an initial creation of chaos or a creation that became chaos – “the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep” – that lasted an indeterminate period of time, after which time God used six days to order his creation. Specifically citing Grotius, in the early nineteenth century Chalmers took the chaos-restitution interpretation and tweaked it to take into account the recently-established antiquity of the Earth. That is to say, Chalmers inserted into the time of chaos, that is, into the gap

provided by Genesis 1:1-2, the entirety of geological time and events. This geologically momentous era was then followed by God's six, twenty-four hour day ordering or restitution of the Earth.⁵

The appeal of Chalmers' gap theory is obvious: one could have an ancient Earth and a literal six-day creation all in one nice-and-neat exegetical package. For the first few decades of the nineteenth century, this was the dominant form of Genesis-geology reconciliation. But after mid-century, it was superseded in popularity by what came to be known as the day-age theory, which, most simply stated, held that the "days" in Genesis 1 are not 24-hour days, but instead periods of time of undefined length. While not the first to make this argument, it was the Scottish geologist, writer, and churchman Hugh Miller (1802-1856) who, particularly in his *The Testimony of the Rocks* (a book he completed on the last day of his life), did the most to advance this argument. While Miller had been an adherent of Chalmers' gap theory, his Scottish compatriot's emphasis on a time of chaos eventually proved unacceptable because, as Davis A. Young has noted, "all the geological evidence indicated to Miller a continuity between the past and the time of the appearance of man." More than this, it seemed to Miller that each of the Genesis days lined up well with (to quote John Hedley Brooke) "sharply differentiated [geological] epochs," at the beginning of each "there had been creative acts of God." As was the case with Chalmers and his gap theory, Miller and others making the case for a day-age approach to Genesis 1 received support from biblical exegetes, who pointed out that in the Bible the Hebrew word for day often means a long period of time, that it was very difficult to imagine that the actions described for each of the days could have been completed in discrete 24-hour periods, and that the "seventh day" has not actually ended (and thus is obviously not a 24-hour day).⁶

In the century after Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, virtually all Protestants who opposed the theory of organic evolution "readily conceded," as Ronald L. Numbers has observed, "that the Bible allowed for an ancient earth and pre-Edenic life." And virtually all of these "old Earth creationists" utilized either the gap theory or the day-age theory to reconcile Genesis 1 and geology. The most influential representative of the former camp was C. I. Scofield. Scofield was a Congregationalist (and then Presbyterian) minister as well as a prominent figure in the late nineteenth century Bible and Prophecy movement, which aimed to inculcate American Protestants in biblical inerrancy and dispensational premillennialism. By the turn of the century, Scofield had committed himself to creating an edition of the King James Version Bible that included notes designed to ensure that readers rightly interpreted the Scripture. The first edition of *The Scofield Reference Bible* was published in 1909, with a second edition appearing in 1917; the unofficial Bible of the fundamentalist movement (which began in 1919), Scofield's Bible was an incredible publishing success story, with two million volumes sold as of 1945. For our purposes, what is most noteworthy are Scofield's comments on Genesis 1. As regards God's creation of the heaven and the Earth (Gen. 1:1), Scofield noted that this occurred "in the dateless past, and gives scope for all the geologic ages." Then the Earth became "without form, and void" (Gen. 1:2), which according to Scofield "clearly indicate[s] that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as the result of a divine judgment," a "catastrophe" which was perhaps due to a "previous testing and fall of angels." But after this time of chaos came the reordering of creation, which on day five included the creation of animal life and on day six the creation of human beings. Regarding the latter, Scofield notes expressly that "man was *created*, not *evolved*" [emphases Scofield's], made "in the 'image and likeness' of God," evinced by his "tri-unity" (spirit, soul, and body) and by "his moral nature."⁷

When it came to the gap theory, Scofield's most important disciple was Harry Rimmer, who was the most prominent antievolutionist of the 1920s and 1930s, who tirelessly lectured and wrote against Darwinism, and who was particularly well-known for his fiery debates with proponents of evolution. Rimmer even debated day-age adherent William Bell Riley, the Baptist preacher who founded the World's Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) in 1919, and who led the 1920s crusade against modernist theology in the churches and evolutionary teaching in the public schools. But the most famous advocate of the day-age theory was three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. Interestingly, while Riley held firmly to the special creation of the species – and may have been moving toward young Earth creationism before his death in 1947 – Bryan (at least privately) did not have trouble squaring evolution with Genesis as long as the special creation of human beings was maintained. Bryan's commitment to the day-age theory came into full view at the 1925 Scopes Trial. Bryan had been recruited by Riley to assist in the prosecution of science teacher John T. Scopes for violating Tennessee's law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in the public schools (a law passed in part because of WCFA pressure). Near the end of the trial, defense attorney Clarence Darrow convinced Bryan to get on the witness stand. Darrow was not only determined to make Bryan's biblical literalism look ridiculous – for example, asking where Adam and Eve's son Cain got his wife, or how Joshua survived three days inside a whale – but also inconsistent, pressing Bryan on his day-age theory:

Q – Do you think the earth was made in six days?

A – Not six days of twenty-four hours.

.....

Q – You do not think that?

A – No. But I think that it would be just as easy for the kind of God we believe in to make

the earth in six days as in six years or in 6,000,000 years or in 600,000,000 years

Q – Do you think those were literal days?

A – My impression is that they were periods.⁸

While the gap and day-age theories held sway until the middle of the twentieth century, after the 1950s many or most old Earth creationists have held to some version of “progressive creationism,” a term popularized by Bernard Ramm in his 1954 book, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*. As articulated by Ramm, the six days of creation are not 24-hour days (as in the gap theory), nor are they tied to six particular geological epochs (as in the day-age theory). Instead, “creation was *revealed* in six days, not *performed* in six days. [That is], the six days are *pictorial-revelatory* days, not literal days nor age-days.” While this approach allows for much time, God still intervenes in creating “root-species,” or “kinds,” which then evolve into other species; however, this is only “horizontal” evolution (or, “radiation”), as “vertical progress takes place only by [God’s] creation.” And of course, this includes the special creation of a historical Adam and Eve, which for progressive creationists remains “an extraordinary act of God that is not explainable by known natural causes.”⁹ In the 21st century, perhaps the most well-known advocates of progressive creationism have been astronomer Hugh Ross and his Reasons to Believe ministry. While Reasons to Believe accepts the Big Bang theory and an ancient universe and Earth, it rejects “macro-evolution” – seeing instead “a single Creator [Who] has generated life throughout Earth’s history” – and accepts “the Christian idea that all humanity descended from two historical persons, Adam and Eve.” In short, while progressive creationism – in its effort to reconcile a plain, commonsensical, literal reading of Genesis with the findings of science – may have jettisoned virtually all of the gap theory and some of the day-age theory, it remains very much within the

tradition of old Earth creationism in its embrace of mainstream geology (and now astronomy) and its rejection of significant components of mainstream biology.¹⁰

In his preface to *The Christian View of Science and Scripture*, Ramm seeks to take on the “ignoble tradition” within Christianity that “has taken a most unwholesome attitude toward science, and [that] has used arguments and procedures not in the better traditions of established scholarship.”¹¹ As Ramm’s chapter on “Geology” makes clear, one of the exemplars of this ignoble tradition was Harry Rimmer and his gap theory. But even more a target of Ramm’s academic ire was George McCready Price (1870-1963), who, over the course of six decades, published many articles and numerous books that argued for a six twenty-four-hour-day creation and a young Earth, all supported by “flood geology.” Ramm was scathing in his attacks on Price, even using a footnote to mention a “geology professor [who] would not let anybody pass sophomore geology till he had refuted Price.” But as Ronald L. Numbers has wryly noted, “if Ramm thought he was officiating at the funeral of flood geology, he was badly mistaken.” In fact, by the latter decades of the twentieth century what goes under the sign of a literal reading of Genesis 1 is the notion of young Earth creationism. As we shall see, Price did much to popularize these claims – but he did not come up with them.¹²

That honor goes to Ellen G. White (1827-1915). In her Methodist adolescence, White became convicted by the arguments of William Miller (1782-1849, of the Millerites) that Jesus would return to Earth in 1843. During the early 1840s, when enthusiasm for the return of Christ and intense religious experience was at a high point, especially among Methodists, White began having powerful dreams and visions. In her second dream, she encountered Jesus who looked piercingly into her eyes and spoke to her directly.¹³ To the disappointment of many, including

White, Jesus did not return in 1843 or later (according to a revised date) on October 22, 1844. But White's dreams and visions continued, and many of them were recorded and published. Over time, White attracted a significant following as a prophet in Advent circles and, in 1863, founded with her husband, James White (1821-1881), a new church—the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.¹⁴

To her followers, White's dreams and visions did not merely offer wise commentary on the Bible; they were “on par with the Bible.” They spoke God's truth. And one of the truths they spoke was that we live on a very young Earth. White claimed that in her vision, God transported her back to the Creation where she watched as its processes unfolded over the course of a week that was “just like every other week.” That is, it consisted of seven twenty-four-hour days. In light of that vision and others, White argued that the Earth was about 6,000 years old (a claim that had by that time been rejected by most evangelicals) and that all signs indicating that the Earth was much older than that could be attributed to catastrophic processes associated with Noah's global flood, which buried the debris from the flood and rearranged the surface of the Earth.¹⁵ For White and her followers, God's revelation to her of a six twenty-four-hour-day creation was important as it grounded the Seventh-Day Adventists' Saturday Sabbath in the Creation—that God created for six days and rested on the seventh.

Price, along with his widowed mother and younger brother, joined the Seventh-Day Adventists at about the age of fourteen. Just three years later, he married an Adventist woman and began selling White's books across eastern Canada. Although Price was utterly convinced of White's claims and enjoyed some success at selling her books, he felt called by God to use his own gifts for writing in the cause of White's literal reading of the Genesis account of creation. Unlike White who was deeply interested in many topics important to a good Christian life

including diet, hygiene, and overall health, Price was singularly focused on refuting once and for all geologists' claims that the Earth was millions of years old.¹⁶

Price focused on geology because he was convinced that the whole argument against a special creation rested upon geology's claim for an old Earth. Although his efforts benefitted from little formal training in the natural sciences, Price nevertheless set out to undermine geology's dating of the Earth by constructing an alternate science that assumed a six twenty-four-hour-day creation and a young Earth and that explained all evidence that appeared to the contrary by way of Noah's global flood.¹⁷

On behalf of a young Earth, Price attacked the method he said geologists used to date the Earth. According to Price, geologists dated the Earth by dating rocks according to the content of the fossils contained within them. And they dated fossils by reference to their location in the geological column. Price argued that this reasoning was circular. In addition, he challenged the notion that rocks and fossils had been deposited in a sequential manner over millions of years to form the geological column. Instead, he argued that the processes of Noah's global and catastrophic flood sorted the debris it produced. Since smaller creatures surely died first in the flood, their remains were deposited most deeply. By contrast, larger creatures, including man, headed for the hills to avoid the floodwaters and, thusly, left their skeletons and fossils on higher ground. In addition to forming the fossil record, he argued, the flood also carved out the Grand Canyon, "piled up" the mountains of the Alps and the Himalayas, and transformed great forests into expansive coal deposits.¹⁸

Later, Price attacked the notion that the location of a fossil amidst a certain layer of rock could indicate the age of the fossil. He did this by pointing to layers of strata that appeared identical yet were identified by geologists through the fossil record as being of vastly different ages. By

Price's reasoning, since fossils in and of themselves offer no guarantee of the age of the matter they appear within and since the strata appeared to be identical, one must reject geology's claim that their formation was separated by millions of years. Instead, one must conclude, as one's direct observation would indicate, that the apparently identical strata were created at the same time.¹⁹

In short, Price argued that the geological column provided no concrete evidence of an old Earth and, further, that there was no evidence to establish the millions of years required for the processes of evolution. Thus, Price concluded, his arguments undermined not only the possibility of evolution but also Darwin's entire argument regarding the origin of species. In so doing, he believed he had restored the Bible to its proper status—as the one literally true account of the Creation, which justified the Saturday Sabbath as a living memorial of a historical event.²⁰

Although Price was a Seventh Day Adventist, his new geology, what he called “flood geology,” exerted significant influence on fundamentalists in the 1920s and 1930s who were busy crusading against Darwinism. William Bell Riley, the great day-age advocate, proclaimed to his followers that Price was “one of the real scientists of the day [whose] writings are destined to profoundly influence the thinking of the future.” At the Scopes Trial Riley's fellow day-age advocate William Jennings Bryan praised Price as one of but two Earth scientists whose views he respected. And Harry Rimmer, the gap theory firebrand, praised Price's *The New Geology* as “the most remarkable and up-to-date book of Geology extant today . . . a masterpiece of REAL Science.”²¹

What is truly remarkable is that, for all the fulsome praise from fundamentalist leaders, none of them seemed to appreciate fully that Price's literal reading of Genesis undermined their own literal readings of Genesis. While the day-age and gap theories served to reconcile Genesis with an old Earth, Price's flood geology washed away an old Earth altogether. But at the Scopes

Trial Bryan somehow both praised Price's geology and made an extended argument in behalf of the day-age theory. And Bernard Ramm could scarcely contain himself in pointing out that Harry Rimmer completely missed the contradiction between his own approach to reading Genesis and Price's interpretation:

In regard to geology Rimmer pays due tribute to Price. But this cannot be done with any consistency. First, the gap theory is invoked to account for geologic ages. Price invokes a universal flood to account for geologic ages. Rimmer *appeals to both!* [emphases Ramm's]²²

Thus, while Price's notions of flood geology spread through American fundamentalism in the middle decades of the twentieth century, the logical consequences of his ideas – the rejection of mainstream geology and the acceptance of a young Earth – were in good part ignored until 1961, when Price's arguments were essentially reiterated in the wildly popular book, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications*.²³ Authors John C. Whitcomb, Jr. (a theologian and Old Testament professor at Grace Seminary in Indiana—1924-) and Henry M. Morris (a PhD in hydraulic engineering and chair of the civil engineering department at Virginia Tech—1918-2006) borrowed liberally from Price's work as they mined Genesis to ascertain the facts of the Creation, critiqued modern geological methods, and mobilized Noah's flood to explain how a year-long global event produced the geological strata that appeared to provide the appearances of an old Earth. Moreover, their aims were, like Price's, to undermine the arguments of mainstream science on behalf of an old Earth and to offer an alternative science—flood geology—that supported their literal reading of the Creation in Genesis. Unfortunately for Price, few reading *The Genesis Flood* appreciated Morris and Whitcomb's indebtedness to his work. Anticipating that evangelicals would likely dismiss out of hand arguments borrowed from a

Seventh-Day Adventist, Morris and Whitcomb kept the origins of their arguments well under the radar. That said, Whitcomb and Morris did take Price's argument on behalf of a literal reading of the Genesis creation account (along, of course, with White's) one step further by claiming that not just the Earth but also the entire universe was created in six twenty-four-hour days less than 10,000 years ago.²⁴

The timing of Morris and Whitcomb's volume could not have been better. By the 1960s, evangelicals were ready for a creationist argument that sounded as though it were steeped in the discourse of science. With its footnotes, photographs, and even the occasional mathematical equation, *The Genesis Flood* offered evangelicals what appeared to be a serious scientific alternative to the rhetorical hegemony of mainstream science. Providing an alternative science for the special creation was crucial since by the 1960s science, with its great success in launching rockets and landing manned space ships on the moon, seemed the incontrovertible discourse of Truth. *The Genesis Flood* mobilized its own, albeit curious, science that, at least for many evangelicals, showed that they (and their literal reading of the Bible) were back in the game of Truth.

In this regard, Morris and Whitcomb's book was arguably one of the most important religious books of the twentieth century. Not only did it transform the way that evangelicals thought about the Creation, it also transformed their understanding of what it means to hold to the inerrant Word of God. Most of those who held to gap theory or the day-age theory understood themselves to hold to an inerrant Bible. But *The Genesis Flood* persuaded a great many evangelicals that – to read the Bible plainly, commonsensically, literally – was to believe in a young Earth and universe and a six twenty-four-hour-day creation. Put differently, after *The Genesis Flood* many evangelicals could conclude that those who held to mainstream geology and

astronomy – not to mention mainstream biology – did not hold to the inerrant Word of God, and perhaps were not really Christians.

Given the widespread enthusiasm for *The Genesis Flood* and its apparent success in grounding a certain literal reading of Genesis within the discourse of science, it is not surprising that a number of organizations soon appeared after its publication to advance the science of flood geology. Two of the most important were the Creation Research Society (CRS), which was established in 1963, and the Institute for Creation Research (ICR), which emerged in 1972. Notably, both had direct ties to Morris. Although the founders of CRS expressed significant differences about flood geology and its ability to account for the signs of an old Earth, they nevertheless dedicated the CRS to the twin projects of producing real scientific research and science textbooks on behalf of a literal reading of the Creation story.²⁵ Likewise, the founders of ICR dedicated it to scientific research and education on behalf of a biblical creation. Despite their earnest intentions for real scientific research that would prove a biblical creation, neither organization managed to produce it. On the whole, mainstream science journals found the research that these organizations produced substantively lacking such that their work, limited as it was, largely went unrecognized and unnoticed.²⁶

More important than any contribution CRS or ICR made to the research base for the creationist cause was, arguably, their provision of an entrée into the US context for Ken Ham. Born in Cairns, Australia in 1951, Ham came to the US and joined the ICR in 1987 with a bachelor's degree in applied science from the Queensland Institute of Technology, a diploma in education from the University of Queensland, some experience as a science educator, and significant success as a speaker on young Earth creationism first on his own and then through the Creation Science Foundation (CSF), an organization similar to the ICR. Importantly, Ham never

shared the goal of the CRS or the ICR of developing a science of young Earth creationism. Instead, his focus was always on spreading a simple three-pronged message that the teaching of evolution was evil and that it produced terrific cultural decay, that the first eleven chapters of Genesis spoke directly and literally about the origins of the universe as well as about the proper way to organize society, and that true Christians should join earnestly in an all-out culture war for the soul of America against atheistic humanism.²⁷

With Henry Morris's blessing and a lot of experience on the young Earth creationist speaking circuit in the US, Ham and a few of his colleagues from ICR formed Answers in Genesis (AiG) in 1994. In the years since then and with the benefit of Ham's leadership, AiG has become the leading young Earth creationist apologetics ministry in the US with its extensive online presence (www.answersingenesis.org) that includes online magazines, blogs, radio shows, a calendar of speaking events and conferences, and an online store where visitors can find an extensive warehouse of creationist apparel, homeschooling curricula, DVDs, and more.

On May 28, 2007, AiG opened its first bricks-and-mortar presence in the form of the 75,000 square foot Creation Museum located just south of Cincinnati, Ohio in Petersburg, Kentucky. By the summer of 2015, the Creation Museum had welcomed 2.4 million people to its many displays, life-size dioramas, and multi-media experiences designed to "point today's culture back to the authority of Scripture and proclaim the gospel message." A second, arguably even more ambitious project, set to open on July 7, 2016, features a life-size re-creation of Noah's Ark built, according to AiG, as closely as possible to the specifications detailed in Genesis 6-8. Located just off exit 154 on Interstate 75 near Williamstown, Kentucky, the massive wood-framed ark of Ark Encounter (510 feet long and 85 feet tall) promises to attract as many as 2 million visitors in its first year.

While the Creation Museum (and all indications are that the Ark Encounter will do the same) clearly reiterates the central arguments of *The Genesis Flood* regarding a six twenty-four-hour creation, a young Earth, and a global flood that explains all signs of an old Earth, its real focus is on the question of who or what serves as the ultimate authority for Truth in 21st century US culture. As the museum points out early in its “Bible Walkthrough Experience” (that takes visitors on a visual tour of the first 11 chapters of Genesis), there are only two possible sources for authority: God’s Word or human reason. Those who rightly choose the authority of a literal reading of God’s Word and are obedient to that Word (by, for example, accepting the claim that marriage can only properly occur between a man and a woman), can in all likelihood look forward to an eternity in heaven. Those who reject that Word and its authority in their lives can look to those who perished in Noah’s flood for indications of what likely lies ahead for them.²⁸

As noted earlier, there is not one and only one “literal” reading of the Bible. That said, and as Susan Harding insightfully points out in *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics*, when it comes to fundamentalist discourse it is a great rhetorical advantage to present one’s “biblical interpretation as ‘more literal’ than another’s.”²⁹ This has certainly been the primary argument young Earth creationists have made when it comes to discounting old Earth creationism. Such an argument has proven to be very persuasive. But it must also be pointed out that – given that there is not one and only one “literal” reading of the Bible – the young Earth creationism of Morris, Whitcomb, and Ham is not likely to be the final word when it comes to reconciling a plain, commonsensical, and literal reading of Genesis with the findings of science.

Given the rules of fundamentalist discourse, it makes sense that what will come next will be an even “more literal” creationism.

Such a creationism is already here, in the form a geocentric creationism that fully accepts the notion that the universe was created in six, twenty-four hour days around 6,000 years ago, but also insists that the sun revolves around a stationary Earth. At the heart of this argument is that it is not enough for creationists to take Genesis literally. They must also take literally Ecclesiastes 1:5 – “The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hurries to the place where it rises” – as well as Joshua 10:12-13:

On the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the Israelites, Joshua spoke to the LORD; and he said in the sight of Israel, “Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in mid-heaven, and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.

Making the case for a biblical “geocentricity” are books with titles such as *He Maketh His Sun to Rise: A Look at Biblical Geocentricity* as well as a host of websites, including the wonderfully titled galileowaswrong.blogspot.com. Perhaps the most prominent 21st-century advocate for an Earth-centered universe is Gerardus Bouw, director of the Association for Biblical Astronomy and author of a number of books on the topic, including *Geocentricity: Christianity in the Woodshed*. While old Earth creationists decry the corruption wrought by the acceptance of the theory of organic evolution, and young Earth creationists decry the decadence wrought by the acceptance of evolution *and* an ancient Earth, Bouw decries the destructive effects wrought by the acceptance of evolution, an ancient Earth, and a heliocentric universe. More than this, he scores “non-geocentric creationists” for their failure to truly take the Bible literally:

Is the Scripture to be the final authority on all matters on which it touches, or are scholars, to be the ultimate authority? The central issue is not the motion of the earth, nor is it the creation of the earth. The issue is final authority, is it to be the words of God, or the words of men?³⁰

Bouw may be on the creationist fringe at the moment, but he summarizes nicely the issue at hand. In the end, all forms of creationism – old Earth, young Earth, geocentric – hinge on this point of biblical authority. All creationists affirm that they stand on the authority of the Word, but that still leaves open the questions as to what that Word – read plainly, commonsensically, literally – actually means, and to what degree can that plain, commonsensical, literal Word be reconciled with mainstream science. The historical trajectory of creationism suggests that we will see less, not more, reconciliation in the future. Put differently, in fifty years Gerardus Bouw, like George McCready Price before him whose arguments once were seen as ridiculous, may be squarely in the creationist mainstream.

¹ Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859-1900* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), xiii-xx. See the entirety of Roberts' book.

² Susan L. Trollinger and William Vance Trollinger, Jr., *Righting America at the Creation Museum* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 2-3.

³ Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2011), 3-54; Kathleen C. Boone, *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 71-75; Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 109-111, 134-147.

⁴ Roberts, *Darwinism*, xiii.

⁵ William Hanna and Dugald Macfadyen, "Thomas Chalmers," in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica Co., 1910), vol. 5, 809-811; Michael B. Roberts, "Genesis Chapter 1 and Geological Time from Hugo Grotius and Marin Mersenne to William Conybeare and Thomas Chalmers (1620-1825)," in *Myth and Geology*, ed. Luigi Piccardi and W. Bruce Masse (London: Geological Society of London, 2007), 41-42, 46; Michael B. Roberts, "The Genesis of John Ray and his Successors," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 74(2002), 155-157.

⁶ Roberts, "Genesis of John Ray," 159; Davis A. Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 58-59; David R. Oldroyd, "The Geologist from Cromarty," in Michael Shortland, ed., *Hugh Miller and the Controversies of Victorian Science* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 103-106; John Hedley Brooke, "Like Minds: The God of Hugh Miller," in Shortland, ed., *Hugh Miller*, 172.

⁷ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design*, expanded ed. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 7, 10-11; Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 137-138; C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (King James Version) (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 3, 5.

⁸ Edward B. Davis, "Introduction," *The Antievolution Pamphlets of Harry Rimmer*, ed. Edward B. Davis), vol. 6 of *Creationism in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (New York: Garland, 1995), ix-xxviii; Numbers, *Creationists*, 55-58, 81-83; William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "Introduction," *The Antievolution Pamphlets of William Bell Riley*, ed. William Vance Trollinger, Jr., vol. 4 of *Creationism in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (New York: Garland, 1995), ix-xx; *The World's Most Famous Court Trial: Tennessee Evolution Case*, 2nd rpt. ed. (Dayton TN: Bryan College, 1990), 298-302.

⁹ Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1954), 195-222, 271-272; Numbers, *Creationists*, 208-211; Pattle P. T. Pun, "A Theology of Progressive Creationism," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 39(March 1987): 9-19.

¹⁰ Fazale Rana, "Repeatable Evolution or Repeated Creation?," *Reasons to Believe*, October 1, 2000, www.reasons.org/articles/repeatable-evolution-or-repeated-creation; "Historical Adam," *Reasons to Believe*, www.reasons.org/rtb-101/historicaladam; Eugenie C. Scott, "Antievolution and Creationism in the United States," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26(1997), 270-271.

¹¹ Ramm, *Science and Scripture*, 9.

¹² Ramm, *Science and Scripture*, 179-188, 195-210 (quote: 181fn12); Numbers, *Creationists*, 211.

¹³ Ann Taves, "Visions," in *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet*, edited by Terrie Dopp Aamodt, Gary Land, and Ronald L. Numbers (New York: Oxford UP, 2014) 32-36. To clarify,

Ellen Harmon White and Ellen G. White are the same person as her full name was Ellen Gould Harmon White.

¹⁴ Jonathan M. Butler, “A Portrait,” in *Ellen Harmon White*, 9-14.

¹⁵ Numbers, *Creationists*, 90; Ronald L. Numbers and Rennie B. Schoepflin, “Science and Medicine,” in *Ellen Harmon White*, 214-215. Importantly, while White argued for a young Earth, she did not argue for a young universe. In fact, she wrote “of inhabited worlds that antedated the Edenic creation.” Numbers, *Creationists*, 228.

¹⁶ Numbers, *Creationists*, 92.

¹⁷ According to Numbers, Price chose not to take any natural science courses during his two years at Battle Creek College (an Adventist school in Michigan) and took only a few introductory natural science classes in the course of a one-year teacher training course that he took in 1896 at the Provincial Normal School of New Brunswick. Numbers, *Creationists*, 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

²¹ Quotes from Numbers, *Creationists*, 115-117. Also: Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 7.

²² Ramm, *Science and Scripture*, 208.

²³ Numbers, *Creationists*, 114-119.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 225-234. Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 8.

²⁵ Numbers, *Creationists*, 250-264.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 301, 315-319.

²⁷ Trollinger and Trollinger, *Righting America*, 8-10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42-58.

²⁹ Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 70-73.

³⁰ Thomas M. Strouse, *He Maketh His Sun to Rise: A Look at Biblical Geocentricity* (Newington CT: Emmanuel Baptist Publications, 2007); Gerardus D. Bouw, *Geocentricity: Christianity in the Woodshed* (Harrison OH: DayStar Publishing, 2013); Gerardus D. Bouw, “Geocentricity: A Fable for Educated Man?,” <http://www.geocentricity.com/ba1/fresp>.