

The Nature of the Neo-Darwinian Criticism of Young Earth Creationists: Personal Reflections on a Tale of Misadventures with History

By Jim Owen

Associate Professor of History, The Master's College

“Let us hear Scripture the way it has been written.” Basil of Caesarea

It may seem strange to a fair-minded observer (if such a creature exists in this post-modern world), that those who hold to the historical necessity of an historical Adam as narrated in Genesis chapters two and three, should be labeled "villainous." ¹ Or that those who hold that the book of Genesis, including the first eleven chapters, is best understood literally and as history, a position hoary with ancient acceptance and respect, would be accused of undermining the gospel,² abetting the enemy,³ or turning youth away from Christ.⁴ (This latter has become something of a cause celebre' in and of, itself). Or perhaps, strangest of all, that men and women with advanced degrees in various sciences, many highly respected in their field and successful, would be accused of seriously hampering evangelical "thinking about God in relationship to the physical world,"⁵ or being labeled intellectually bankrupt in scientific and theological matters.⁶ And perhaps most outrageously, being accused of harboring a mental disorder known as "Identity Foreclosure."⁷ Such are the dimensions, however, of the accusations leveled against those who hold that the first eleven of Genesis from the first word to the last are historical, and as such supportive of a Young Earth perspective.

The above accusations are grievous, of course, and somewhat outlandish. Others could be added. They are attacks on the intellect and character of Young Earth Creationists and are given in conjunction with criticism of Young Earth Creationists' scientific opinions and interpretations of Scripture. I draw attention to them not so we may feel sorry for ourselves or give tit for tat. Rather we need to be aware that this is part of the attack to discredit Young Earth Creationism and a literal, historical interpretation of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. It is what is being said in classrooms and written about in books and blogs and read by multi-thousands of evangelicals. And because they are personal, they cannot really be refuted without descending into juvenile argumentation. How do I prove someone is wrong who accuses me of being intellectually bankrupt because I don't agree with them? I can't, of course. No matter how carefully I may exegete Genesis based on the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, it won't make any difference. If I conclude that the best interpretation of Genesis 1-11 is historical, that this was the author's intent, taking into consideration grammatical issues, historical context, cultural considerations and historical understanding, it doesn't matter. I won't be believed. For in the words of one recent critic: "...it is hard not to conclude that 'scientific' creationism and strict literalism on Genesis represents not only a degenerative scientific paradigm but a degenerating theological paradigm as well."⁸ Obviously, with opinions such as these mixed in with more traditional objections the atmosphere is easily polluted.

But it indicates that more than a struggle over a proper interpretation of Genesis 1-11 is taking place. There is on the part of many evangelicals embracing Darwinian evolution a desire to "capture" Christianity and interpret it along evolutionary lines, but in the process destroy the credibility of any who might oppose them. This may sound overstated, but it is hard to conclude otherwise when one considers all that is being said and written, and we will consider a great deal of this before this essay is concluded. It was once common currency among evangelicals that it didn't matter your position on the length of days in Genesis One or whether you believed in a universal or local flood. What mattered was the gospel and what you believed about Jesus Christ, but even this was reduced to five fundamentals.⁹ In light of the current battle over the historicity of a real Adam, such a lackadaisical attitude toward Genesis on the part of past evangelicals was a gigantic mistake. There has developed a mind-set increasingly intolerant of any who might oppose neo-Darwinian evolution as the only valid world view within which the truths of Christianity must be interpreted.¹⁰

It must be admitted that those who hold to a Young Earth Creationism, that is, that Genesis 1-11 is meant to be understood as real history, that this is the author's only intent, and who believe God's Word is infallible and inerrant, and the ultimate authority (*Sola Scriptura*), do present the Evangelical community with an either/or dilemma. Young Earth Creationists say there is no middle ground. Such a position, though, guarantees confrontation. This is doubly true now that neo-Darwinian evangelicals are denying the possibility that there could have been a real, historical Adam and Eve or a real, historical fall as given in Genesis chapters two and three. At heart, by their position, Young Earth Creationists challenge one of the most cherished principles that undergirds the neo-Darwinian approach to anthropology and geology, that is, that a methodological atheism is the best way to understand nature and history.

What are the Real Issues?

Given all of the above, it would be informative to consider the arguments (other than the personal), used against the Young Earth Creationists' position on Genesis 1-11. And we will do so by evaluating the writings of three strong critics of Young Earth Creationists and their supposed "wooden literalism." The three we will consider are Mark Noll (*The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 1994), Francis Collins (*The Language of God*, 2006), and the newest addition, Ronald S. Osborn (*Death Before the Fall*, 2014). Although the books are separated by a span of 20 years, the arguments put forward to prove Young Earth Creationism is a disgrace to evangelicalism in particular and Christianity in general, are surprisingly similar.

Actually, no matter how you consider it, there seems to be only two basic criticisms against any who embrace Young Earth Creationism. Criticism one: Young Earth Creationists' "wooden literalism"¹¹ of Genesis 1-11 is over simplistic, if not self-deluding, improperly exegeted due to hidden presuppositions, and at odds with past Christian understanding of these chapters. It does not stem so much from sound exegesis as

from a fundamentalist world-view. Or as Osborn puts it, "Creationist apologetics are not credible."¹² End of argument.

The second criticism might be labeled the "priority of the hermeneutic of science." Put another way, modern science (i.e., neo-Darwinism), with its methodological atheism, determines how we interpret Genesis 1-11. Those who hold to this hermeneutic are amazed, frustrated, horrified, angered, and befuddled that anyone would dare interpret Genesis 1-11 literally and historically. It can all be nicely summed up by the following quote from *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*;

. . . if the consensus of modern scientists, who devote their lives to looking at the data of the physical world, is that humans have existed on the planet for a very long time, it is *foolish* for the biblical interpreter to say that "the Bible teaches" the recent creation of human beings.¹³ (Italics mine)

Of course, behind Noll's conclusion are a host of questions about determining the meaning of Scripture or whether Scripture has any set meaning at all and if so how do we determine that meaning, and whether it is infallible and inerrant in whole or only in part or not at all, and who determines this. But sadly, we haven't room to pursue these questions in this essay.

They Don't Know Their History!

The first accusation, that those who insist that the first few chapters of Genesis are to be understood as real, literal history are at odds with past understanding of these chapters, seems somewhat strange to me, given what I know of church history, having taught it for over thirty years, but it is only fair that we hear what Collins, Noll, and Osborn have to say in this regard.

Collins is the most gracious, though he personally has little respect for Young Earth Creationists. He commends conservative exegetes for wanting to defend Scripture from liberal assaults,¹⁴ and acknowledges that "there are clearly parts of the Bible that are written accounts of historical events," nevertheless, he denies that the first few chapters of Genesis fall into that category. Rather they must be understood allegorically, "a poetic and powerful allegory of God's plan for the entrance of the spiritual nature (the soul) and the moral law into humanity."¹⁵

In promoting his position, Collins places himself in good company. "To Saint Augustine," he writes, "and to most other interpreters throughout history, until Darwin put believers on the defensive, the first chapters of Genesis had much more the *feel* of a morality play than an eye-witness report on the evening news."¹⁶ (Italics mine.) Although he offers no citations of past exegetes to verify his declaration, he goes on to assert that the "narrow" and unilateral interpretation given by the likes of Young Earth Creationists to Genesis 1-11 is not only unnecessary but it [surprisingly] also "is largely a creation of the last hundred years, arising in large consequences as a reaction to Darwinian evolution."¹⁷

Noll takes a different tact. He asserts that the problem is in the Young Earth Creationists' unrecognized presuppositions. Conservative evangelicals who read the first chapters of Genesis literally are guilty of imposing a "preunderstanding" to the way they interpret the Bible. "Evangelicals make much of their validity to read the Bible," he writes,

in a simple "literal" or "natural" fashion—that is in a Baconian way. In actual fact, evangelical hermeneutics, as illustrated in creationism, is dictated by very specific assumptions that dominated Western intellectual life from roughly 1650 to 1850 (and in North America for a few decades more). Before and after that time, many Christians and other thinkers have recognized that no observations are "simple" and no texts yield to uncritical "literal" reading.¹⁸

With this insight in place (although he, too, offers no examples from the past to support his assertion), Noll concludes that while "millions of evangelicals *think* (my italics) they are defending the Bible by defending creation science," in reality, they are not. Instead, what they are doing is "giving ultimate authority to the merely temporal, situated, and contextualized interpretations of the Bible that arose from the mania for science of the early nineteenth century."¹⁹ Evangelicals who do this, Noll believes, are actually "being unfaithful to the Bible...."²⁰ What does it mean, then, to be faithful to the Bible? It means that the hermeneutic of science must have absolute priority when interpreting and understanding Genesis 1-11 authorial intent notwithstanding.

Osborn, who is the most critical of Young Earth Creationists, whose book at times is little more than a rant against them, is also of the opinion that Young Earth Creationists have misconstrued Genesis 1-11, that they have imposed their interpretation upon the text due to an underlying agenda of foundationalism:

The reason literalists (i.e. Young Earth Creationists) read the creation narratives and other parts of Scripture the way they do is because they are already committed to a very specific philosophical and theological research program, namely, to a kind of foundationalism that owes its lineage to the ideas of Descartes and other Enlightenment thinkers as much if not more than to the ideas of Scripture."²¹

It is amazing, when one stops to think about it, how so many seem to know why I interpret Scripture the way I do without asking me! And I had no idea I was so messed up. One thing is puzzling, though. No mention is made by our critics of Young Earth Creationists, because they are conservative evangelicals, commitment to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic in interpreting Scripture, an approach that can trace its roots back to the Antiochean School of exegesis of the fourth century. Such an approach takes historical statements in Scripture at face value, that is, literally. In fact, one critic of conservative evangelicals, in discussing Diodore of Tarsus (d. ca AD 390), one of the founders of the Antiochean school of exegesis, made these surprisingly favorable

comments about today's conservative exegetes. "At this juncture," Christopher Hall writes,

Diodore's thinking is similar to the modern pastor who fully expects the Old Testament text to possess lasting relevance for a contemporary Christian audience. Conservative biblical interpreters trained in grammatical-historical exegesis will likely take a close look at historical and cultural context, political and theological background, and lexical and grammatical considerations. They will try hard to hear what the text might have said to its original audience. But they will also, particularly because of their high view of the inspiration and authority of all of Scripture, fully expect the Old Testament text still to speak today.²²

This hardly fits under the heading of "preunderstanding" or "foundationalism." It sounds more like a case of diligently studying Scripture to understand what it is saying. Young Earth Creationists are fully committed to the historical-grammatical hermeneutic when interpreting Scripture. You would not know this from reading Noll or Collins or Osborn. Such an omission is troubling. Why is it ignored? (Nor would you know, for that matter, that Jesus, Paul, and Peter seemed to have understood Genesis 1-11 as I do—as real history.) The assertion that the reason why Young Earth Creationists interpret Genesis literally is somehow at odds with the church of the past just cannot be sustained.

For example, if my literal interpretation of Genesis 1-11 really is a product of a knee-jerk reaction to Darwinism, or an attempt to rationalize an Enlightenment foundationalism, or an almost unconscious response to cultural forces and modern intellectual currents—say anti-neo-Darwinism and a craze for Baconian inductive reasoning, and therefore I am a stranger to the past, why did Martin Luther (AD 1483-1546) interpret Genesis 1-11 with the same "wooden literalism" I am accused of? What influenced him to be a six-day creationist? Descartes? The Enlightenment? A modern "mania for science?" Not likely. "We know from Moses," he wrote, "that the world was not in existence 6,000 years ago...." Luther was aware that among the early Church Fathers, "great lights" such as Hillary (AD 315?-368) and Augustine (AD 354-430) were "instantaneous" creationists, but he did not agree with them. Neither was he willing to accept allegory:

Nor does it serve any useful purpose to make Moses at the outset so mystical and allegorical. His purpose is to teach us, not about allegorical creatures and an allegorical world but real creatures and a visible world apprehended by the senses...he employs the terms "day" and "evening" without allegory just as we customarily do.²³

Luther concluded with the following:

That Moses spoke in a literal sense, not allegorical or figuratively, i.e. that the world with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read. If we do not comprehend the reason for this, let us remain pupils and leave the job of teacher to the Holy Spirit.²⁴

Wow-powerful stuff! Luther writes like a twenty-first century Young Earth Creationist, doesn't he? But the Father of the Reformation rejected the four-fold allegorical approach to Scripture that had so dominated the Medieval Church and embraced a literal only interpretation of the Bible. *Sola Scriptura* literally interpreted became one of the primary hallmarks of the Reformation. And no matter how much Noll and the others try to smother Young Earth Creationists in Bacon and the Enlightenment, the truth of the matter is that like the good Protestant, conservative evangelicals they are, many Young Earth Creationists are still deeply influenced by the Reformation and its theology and exegesis.

Let us not stop with Luther, however. Let us go way back before 1650. Let us talk about Basil of Caesarea (AD 329-379). In his *Hexaemeron*, a series of 9 homilies on the six days of creation, he strongly advocated a literal reading of the first chapter of Genesis. Basil was aware that there were those exegetes

who do not admit the common sense of Scripture, for whom water is not water ... who see in a plant, in a fish, what their fancy wishes, who change the nature of reptiles and wild beast to suit their allegories²⁵

Basil (very familiar with the radical allegorical interpretations of Origen), wanted none of it. "For me," he told his listeners, "grass is grass; plant, fish, wild beast, domestic animals, I take all in the literal sense."²⁶ "Is not the purpose of Scripture," he continued, the "edification and making perfect our souls?" The allegorists have failed to grasp this, Basil reasoned, and thus "have undertaken to give a majesty of their own invention to Scripture. It is to believe themselves wiser than the Holy Spirit, and to bring forth their own ideas under a pretext of exegesis. *Let us hear Scripture the way it has been written.*"²⁷ (Italics mine) Very wise advice that should be heeded in our day. To brush aside authorial intent will lead anyone astray. I think it is safe to add Basil to the ranks of Young Earth Creationism. And in passing we can also add John Chrysostom (AD 347-407) to our ranks. Chrysostom, one of the greatest preachers of the early church, was Calvin's favorite exegete among the Church Fathers because he consistently applied a "woodenly" literal hermeneutic to his interpretation of Scripture. Calvin embraced Augustine's theology but not his fanciful allegorical exegesis.

And at this point, I have to pause as it were and share an aside that occurred to me as I wrote the above sentences. Having mentioned Calvin's admiration of Chrysostom, I decided it would be wise to add an endnote with a citation to support it. So I contacted a colleague in the English department who is in the process of writing his Ph. D. thesis on John Calvin. He sent me an email listing a few sources I could consult and then added the following:

But the best is probably this: Calvin intended to translate into French and publish an annotated edition of Chrysostom's homilies; he wrote a Latin Preface in which he said: "The chief merit of our Chrysostom is this: he took great pains everywhere not to deviate in the slightest from the genuine plain

meaning of Scripture, and not indulge in any license of twisting the straight forward sense of the words....”²⁸

After supplying me with the source of the above quote, my colleague went on to write:

It is also common place among Calvin scholars that his remarks in the Preface to the Commentary on Romans (written during the Strassbourg pastorate in 1540) is deeply influenced by Chrysostom’s hermeneutic modal. For example, the dedication to Simon Grynaeus uses, in the very first sentence, the phrase ‘lucid brevity’ to denote the primary mark of an excellent expositor. This is explicitly the phrase of Chrysostom, ‘brevitas et claritas.’²⁹

As I finished reading my colleague’s email, the irony of the situation sunk into my ancient brain. On the one hand, here is Calvin praising Chrysostom for not deviating “in the slightest from the genuine plain meaning of Scripture,” and wanting to imitate him in this regard, and on the other hand, we have Mark Noll denouncing Young Earth Creationists for doing the same thing Calvin wanted to do and Chrysostom did. In the process, Noll seems to deny that the Young Earth Creationists devotion and use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, which stresses a literal approach when interpreting Scripture, has in any way guided their interpretation of Genesis 1-11. Instead, he alleges that their reading of Genesis is derived from presuppositions that give “ultimate authority to the merely temporal, situated, and contextualized interpretations of the Bible that arose from the mania for science of the early nineteenth century.” Thus, Noll asserts, Young Earth Creationists are guilty of “being unfaithful to the Bible....”³⁰

But if that is the case, and young Earth Creationists and Chrysostom both interpret Scripture in a plain, literal way, then we must ask what “preunderstanding” controlled Chrysostom’s mind that “compelled” him to interpret Genesis in such a plain and literal fashion? Was he, too, being unfaithful to the Bible in doing so? And what shall we say of Calvin who so admired Chrysostom for his literalness? Something is awry here, folks, and it isn’t the way Young Earth Creationists interpret Genesis 1-11. Could it be that the reason Young Earth Creationists and Chrysostom, though separated by centuries, interpreted Genesis in a plain and literal manner, is because taking authorial intent into consideration (along with New Testament affirmations), this is the only way to understand these verses if one is going to have credibility as a serious exegete, and exegetes across the centuries have recognized this in common? The noise you hear in the background is the collapse of Noll’s allegation to the contrary into a splintered and broken heap of questionable credibility due to an extreme bias that has exiled all fairness and historical balance. And the same holds true for Collins, and also, likewise, Osborn.

One final note on Chrysostom before moving on to Theodore of Mopsuestia, one of my favorite people in church history. Not only was Chrysostom a “wooden literalist,” but he also believed Noah’s ark was still in existence in his day and if any wanted to make the journey, they could visit it.³¹ You won’t find much sympathy for allegorical

interpretations among his exegetical studies. And as far as he was concerned, a given text did indeed “yield to an uncritical ‘literal’ reading.”

Theodore of Mopsuestia (AD 350-428) was perhaps the greatest of the Antiochean exegetes and he had nothing but contempt for those who allegorized Scripture because they (“those people,” he called them), treated the historical in Scripture with complete indifference. “Those people,” he wrote, “...turn it all into the contrary, as if the entire historical account of divine Scripture differed in no way from dreams in the night.” The end result? “Adam is not Adam, paradise is not paradise, the serpent is not the serpent.” If they keep doing this, Theodore warned, “they will have no history left.”³² “If their assertions are true,” he lamented,

...if they are correct, not even the reason for the events surrounding Christ's coming will be clear. The Apostle [Paul] says that Christ cancelled Adam's disobedience and annulled the death sentence. What were those events in the distant past to which he refers, and where did they take place, if the historical account relating them does not signify real events, but something else, as these people maintain? What room is left for the Apostle's words, “but I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve” [2 Cor. 11:3], if there was no serpent, no Eve, nor any seduction elsewhere involving Adam?³³

Theodore's comments can be seen as not only prophetic but pertinent for today's debate on the necessity of an historic Adam as they were in his day. It almost seems as if he were addressing present day neo-Darwinian evangelicals, doesn't it? I think we can add Theodore to the ranks of Young Earth Creationists.

Last but not least, let us consider the famous Augustine. Collins believes that were Augustine alive today and presented with the evidence supporting neo-Darwinism, he would immediately embrace theistic evolution.³⁴ It is a questionable way to try and claim approval by “Great lights” of the past (Osborn tries the same thing with Calvin³⁵), but ultimately it is an exercise in self-serving fiction. Such claims have a less than convincing quality about them. And alas, Augustine isn't alive today, but when he did live, he was a creationist plain and simple. (A fact our trio of critics fail to acknowledge when gleaning Augustine's writings for a quote that will seemingly support their priority of the hermeneutic of science.) In fact, we could add him to the ranks of the Young Earth Creationists for he believed, on the authority of Scripture, that the earth was less than 6,000 years old.³⁶ True, he wasn't a six day creationist. Instead, as Luther pointed out, he was an instantaneous creationist, that is, all the creation events listed in Genesis one, supposedly taking place over six days, were actually all created instantaneously and simultaneously. Why then does Genesis one divide creation into six days? According to Augustine, for the benefit of those who are slow on the up-take, people such as you and I:

Why, then, was there any need for six distinct days to be set forth in the narrative of the text one after another? The reason is that those who cannot understand the

meaning of *He created all things together*, cannot arrive at the meaning of Scripture unless the narrative proceeds slowly step by step.³⁷

Perhaps my name should be Jim the Dim? I wonder if Augustine was suppressing a smile when he penned those words. Probably not. In my mind's eye I see him as acetic, austere, maybe even dour, but a brilliant theologian who did not take kindly to opposition. He had but one fault—he could not spell humor let alone participate in it. But that is simply the product of my run-away imagination. What is not a product of my imagination is that despite his addiction to allegorical interpretation, Augustine did not reject the historicity of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. This is the difference between Augustine and Collins, something Collins does not seem to grasp. For Augustine, Genesis 1-11 is both historically real and at the same time possess an allegorical meaning beyond the historical. For example, in rebuking those who only wanted to understand the Garden of Eden allegorically, Augustine wrote: "How absurd to maintain that there could not have been a material paradise because it can be understood also in a spiritual sense."³⁸ And a few paragraphs later in *The City of God* he wrote:

This is what may be said, and there are possibly other more appropriate statements that may be made—no one forbids—in connexion [sic] with the allegorical interpretation of paradise. There is one condition, however: we must also believe in the actual truth of that story which is presented to us in a most faithful record of events.³⁹

And later, at the end of Book XV of *The City of God*, when discussing the Noachic flood and the Ark, he wrote the following:

No person, therefore, however stubborn, will venture to suppose that this account was written to no purpose; nor can it be reasonably said that the events happened, they do not have a symbolic significance, or that we have only symbolic words here without any basis in fact Rather we must believe that the transmission of this account in a written history was a wise action, that the events did take place....⁴⁰

So Augustine supported both a literal, historical reality to Genesis 1-11 as well as an allegorical meaning to these verses and saw no tension in doing so. At the same time, what I have quoted above from the *City of God* shows that Collins misrepresented Augustine's position on Genesis 1-11.

I think it is beyond dispute that practically all the early Church Fathers believed Genesis 1-11 was true history, whether they also believed there was a deeper meaning embedded in these chapters or not. Given the above (and more names of Church Fathers could be added), it is puzzling, even disturbingly puzzling, why our three critics make the accusations they do. If the Young Earth Creationists are guilty of a "wooden literalism" (whatever that is), what shall we say of those I have discussed above? One could easily turn Collins' claim on its head and write; "Prior to the nineteenth century,

most Christian scholars would have accepted Genesis 1-11 as real history." Try as they might, no scholar today has the authority to make Christians of the past say what they did not say or believe what they did not believe.

Noll and Osborn both want to confine Young Earth Creationists' literal interpretation of Genesis to their mental imprisonment to Baconian factualism and Enlightenment thought. In fact, Osborn, who is totally committed to a non-literal understanding of Genesis 1-11, goes so far as to claim "when believers sever themselves from the long tradition of both Protestant and Catholic as well as Jewish non-dogmatic and non-literalistic approaches to the question of origins, the result is *fundamentalism*."⁴¹ And fundamentalism (aka Young Earth Creationists) advocates inerrancy and infallibility, and is rigid, censorial, and close-minded. In fact, "fundamentalism," Osborn asserts, "is an idolatrous form of human reasoning..."⁴²

One would never know from reading Osborn that there is a long tradition of interpreting Genesis 1-11 literally and understanding it as real history, a tradition reestablished by the Reformers. But even during the Middle Ages, when the four-fold allegorical method of exegesis dominated the Roman Catholic Church, Genesis 1-11 was still accepted as historically true. And during this period, there were those who declared for a return to the authority of Scripture literally interpreted; men such as Nicholas of Lyra, Marsilio of Padua, John Wycliffe, John Colet, and Wessel of Gansfort to name a few. In other words, there were a whole lot of "fundamentalists" throughout church history that Young Earth Creationists can point to as mentors and fellow travelers.

And while before 1650 there may have been "many Christian and other thinkers" who recognized that no observations are "simple" and no text yield to "uncritical 'literal' reading," as Noll claims (although on a common sense level this statement approaches absurdity), and there were, as Augustine and Theodore of Mopsuestia both noted, those who wanted to reduce all of Scripture to allegory, nevertheless, a considerable number of outstanding Christian thinkers evidently disagreed, and did read Genesis 1-11 with a "wooden literalism," and accepted it as real history as authorial intent intended. How was this possible absent the pressure of Darwinism and an addiction to Bacon? Why try to hide this? Why not simply acknowledge it?

Exactly why our trio of critics misrepresent history (especially by omission) to discredit those who hold to an historical reading of Genesis 1-3 or Genesis 6-9 is truly puzzling. Young Earth Creationists' literal interpretation of Genesis 1-11 is very much in line with past exegesis, much more so than those today who wish to convert these chapters into pure allegory. To believe otherwise is to misrepresent or be ignorant of church history. But perhaps this is what some neo-Darwinists prefer.

The Priority of the Hermeneutic of Science

The argument for the priority of the hermeneutic of science would appear to be more formidable. It is the hammer with which neo-Darwinian evangelicals and liberals hope to beat Young Earth Creationists and others who may hold to the necessity of an

historical Adam, into a disgraced silence or a fideistic isolation. Collins, for example, as noted, believes Genesis two and three, in contrast to a host of past great exegetes, "is a poetic and powerful allegory of God's plan for the entrance of the Spiritual nature (the soul), and the moral law into humanity."⁴³ He is unflinching in his support of the priority of the hermeneutic of science. "I do not believe," he writes,

that the God who created all the universe, and who communicates with his people through prayer and spiritual insight, would expect us to deny the obvious truths of the natural world that science *revealed* to us, in order to prove our love for him.⁴⁴ (Italics mine.)

As far as Collins is concerned, the revelation of science (i.e., neo-Darwinian evolution), easily trumps the revelation of Scripture. Nowhere is this better expressed than in his comments that;

...studies of human variation, together with the fossil record, all point to an origin of modern humans approximately a hundred thousand years ago, most likely in East Africa. Genetic analysis suggest that approximately ten thousand ancestors gave rise to the entire population of 6 billion on the planet. How then does one blend these *scientific observations* with the story of Adam and Eve?⁴⁵ (Italics mine.)

Well, from Collins' perspective you can't so you don't. Evolution exegetes biblical history into allegory in the blink of an eye and no one is to swallow hard as history is abolished from Genesis and the theological fall-out is ignored or explained away.

Osborn, who considers "scientific creationism" bogus and destructive, and I'm sure many agree with him, doesn't spend much time or words discussing it. In his eyes, creationism is anything but "a progressive scientific paradigm." Rather he sees it as a "degenerating research program" though he doesn't seem very familiar with what research Creationists might be conducting.⁴⁶ He does negatively comment on the attempt of Creation geologists to reinterpret the modern geological column in light of the Noahic Flood. Their literal interpretation of the Flood "strains credulity for *biblical* reasons, precisely in the light of the heavy *scientific* lifting they want the story [to] perform."⁴⁷

Osborn, of course, prefers a more allegorical, or as he labels it, "theological" interpretation of the Genesis flood. It might be worth considering, he writes:

that the real concern of the Genesis writer (or writers) was theological rather than scientific in nature and that the story of Noah's flood was meant to tell us about God's providential care of people and animals in the face of human violence (Gen. 6:11), even if nothing whatever about God's historical creation of the Matterhorn and Mount Kilimanjara?⁴⁸

Russell Crowe, aka Noah, might have approved of Osborn's interpretation, I think. Inadvertently, Osborn touches on the key to the Young Earth Creationists position, that

is, the Noahic Flood. If there was no universal historical flood then Genesis 6-9 is so much fiction and that would probably hold true for the rest of Genesis 1-11. And trying to convert the Noahic flood into a local flood, an exercise in taking the obvious and obscuring it, or trying to convert it into an allegory of God's providential care, a flight of subjective fancy that ignores intelligent exegesis and Basil's plea to "hear Scripture the way it has been written," won't rescue Genesis 1-11 from being laughed off the historical stage.

Now, New Testament Scripture supports a historical universal flood a few thousand years ago. Both Matthew (24:36-39) and Luke (17:26, 27) have Jesus comparing the global judgment that will take place at His second coming with the global judgment that was rendered by Noah's flood. I Peter 3: 19 and 20 claim that all human life was lost except for 8 people in the waters of the Noahic Flood. And in II Peter 3: 3-7, those who scoff at the 2nd. coming and its ensuing judgment, are rebuked for "deliberately" (interesting choice of words) forgetting the Noahic Flood "deluged and destroyed" "the world of that time." (NIV) If there was not a universal flood as described in Genesis 6-9, what are we to make of these Scriptures? What are we to make of the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Peter for making such a non-existent comparison? What are we to make of a God who misleads us? If we cannot trust New Testament Scripture here how can we trust it elsewhere?

Before the rise of the present day "hermeneutic of disbelief" that has so permeated the evangelical community one often read that the Noahic Flood was also "remembered" in the myths and legends of many of the ancient civilizations. For example, an 1821 Theological Dictionary had this to say regarding such:

That the Greeks and western nations had some knowledge of the flood has never been denied; and the Musselmen, Chinese, and Americans, have traditions of the deluge. The ingenious Mr. Bryant, in his Mythology, has pretty clearly proved that the deluge, so far from being unknown to the heathen world at large, is in reality conspicuous through-out every one of their acts of religious worship. In India, also, Sir William Jones has discovered, that in the oldest mythological books of that country, there is such an account of the deluge as corresponds sufficiently with that of Moses.⁴⁹

Interestingly, if half of what is quoted above is true, then ancient civilizations, nations, and tribes around the globe retain in their myths, legends, and traditions, a memory of the Great Deluge. Granted this is not hard, verifiable historical evidence, but it is worth noting nonetheless. For those inclined to dismiss the possibility that an actual historic event lies at the base of these ancient myth, legends, and traditions, let me remind them of a place called Troy and the war associated with it, all over a beautiful woman. Homer related historical truth in masterful poetic form.

Over against the above is modern geology based on the principle of uniformitarianism—present geological processes are the key to past geological processes—and a time scale that embraces hundreds of millions of years. Add to this a meth-

odology that is atheistic to the core. Such a naturalistic approach finds no evidence of the Noahic Flood in the geologic column. Even with the rise of Cataclysmic geology, which has shown that the present isn't always the key to the past uniformitarian geology is still in denial regarding the Noahic Flood a few thousand years ago. It appears we have an insurmountable stand-off between Scripture and uniformitarian geology. One I have no self-proclaimed right or authority to dismiss or dodge by changing Scripture that was written to record history into an allegory.

Nevertheless, a large segment of the evangelical community has embraced the priority of the hermeneutic of science in the discipline of geology and abandoned any belief in the historicity of a universal Noahic Flood. Was Scripture errant then? No not really, just misunderstood by thousands for thousands of years until the present. The result is found in the following comment taken from the 2000 *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*:

Scientific evidence does not support a universal flood corresponding to the biblical account. Marine fossils commonly found in mountainous areas resulted from geological uplifts....Nevertheless, the absence of scientific or historical evidence, measured by modern human standards does not detract from the biblical story's abiding theological significance as a compelling story about God and God's relationship with humanity.⁵⁰

How comforting.

Noll, in his very influential book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, agrees with Eerdmans and at the same time politely trashes Young Earth Creationists' geologists without mentioning them:

Given such a disparity of conviction—between, on the one side, professionally trained scientists, who spend most of their working days looking at the physical world, and a vast evangelical populace, on the other side, with deeply settled convictions about what the Bible means—it is little wonder that thinking about God in relationship to the physical world can only creep along slowly (if at all) among evangelicalsscientists like [David] Young are discouraged about the apparent unwillingness of evangelicals at large (in contradistinction to many evangelical scientists) to take seriously the task of looking at the world.⁵¹

Noll's comments are conspicuous for what they omit as much as for what they assert. There are the trained evangelical scientists who know that uniformitarian geology and neo-Darwinian evolution are true (thus Genesis 1-11 can't be), and over against them is the "vast evangelical populace" who think they know what the Bible says/means (but really don't). One would never know from reading Noll that among that "vast evangelical populace" are highly trained theologians who are highly skilled in exegeting Scripture, or hundreds of highly trained and successful scientists who are Young Earth Creationists and believe in the historicity of Genesis 1-11. Included among them are many geologists, also well trained and successful, who believe the

Noahic Flood was an actual historic event and are interpreting the geologic column with this in mind. And they believe that the geological column, itself, offers evidence in support of their position. The grinding of the teeth of uniformitarians/neo-Darwinians of all shapes and sizes is loud and nerve-racking. It is interesting that Noll felt constrained to resort to censorship to deny any scientific validity to those scientists who are Young Earth Creationists. How sad. It is a malady that afflicts many neo-Darwinian evangelicals.

So, what do we know about Genesis 1-11 if only interpreted by neo-Darwinian evangelicals? The story of Adam and Eve never occurred in any historical sense. Rather it is an allegory, Collins tells us, "a poetic and powerful allegory of God's plan for the entrance of the spiritual nature (the soul) and the moral law into humanity."⁵² As for the Noahic Flood, well, at best an embarrassing exaggeration, historically speaking. Modern uniformitarian geology says it didn't happen so it didn't happen. But take heart. Such potentially discouraging news "does not detract from the biblical story's abiding *theological* (italics mine) significance as a compelling story about God and God's relationship with humanity."⁵³

Of course, this is about as innocuous a theological assertion as could be written, and therefore utterly meaningless. One can't help but feel sorry at times for neo-Darwinist evangelicals who must write such stuff to rescue God and His Word from being tossed under the bus. But perhaps it is as Theodore of Mopsuestia said, since they have abolished history from the Bible, all they can do is present the creations of their own imagination in its place.

Noll is relentless about the damage he believes Young Earth Creationism causes. "By holding on so determinedly, to our beliefs concerning how we conclude God had made nature, we evangelicals, Noll writes, "forfeited the opportunity to glorify God for the way he had made nature."⁵⁴ Noll is offended that we might "think one could interpret the Bible on scientific question without employing a dialogue between natural and biblical observations Such an approach "was to guarantee *misunderstanding* of Scripture."⁵⁵ "The best theology," he argues, "should understand and incorporate the best science," and until the rise of Young Earth Creationism, Noll believes, such was the case among evangelicals. This was especially true among evangelical scholars in the latter half of the nineteenth century, no matter what their position on Darwinism.⁵⁶

To emphasis and support his point, he quotes the very influential 19th century conservative theologian, Charles Hodge (AD 1797-1878), who was a vocal opponent of Darwinism. I repeat that part of the quote that is pertinent to the subject at hand:

When the Bible speaks of the foundations, or pillars of the earth, or of the solid heavens, or of the motion of the sun, do not you and every other sane man interpret the language by the facts of science? For five thousand years the church understood the Bible to teach that the earth stood still in space, and that the sun and stars revolved around it. Science has demonstrated that this is not

true. Shall we go on to interpret the Bible as to make it teach the falsehood that the sun moves around the earth, or shall we interpret by science, and make the two harmonize.⁵⁷

Hodge does caution against going over-board in this regard, of giving science absolute authority. Nevertheless, Hodge is guilty of extreme historical simplification and even ignorance, and the fear of being tarred with the "Galileo" brush haunts his every word. Secular Darwinists of the period were viciously attacking Christianity as being anti-science (and thus an enemy of progress). To counter such attacks, evangelicals embraced the hermeneutic of science with great gusto as Noll's comments indicate. By the time *The Fundamentals* (1912-1915) were published the Day-age theory had replaced six, 24 hour days as the proper interpretation of Genesis one, solid, historical exegesis notwithstanding. Even more troubling, Genesis 6-9 was reinterpreted as a local flood rather than a universal flood despite such Scriptures as II Peter 3:3-7. There was no record of the global-wide Noahic Flood in the Uniformitarian's geologic column therefore it never happened, and evangelicals fell all over themselves in their haste to reinterpret Scripture accordingly. And Christianity, as noted earlier, found itself reduced to five fundamentals. Over-all, it is a sad commentary on the intimidating effect of giving undue priority to the hermeneutic of science and ignoring clear, historical Scriptural assertions. The rise of a Young Earth Creationist movement, reconnecting Genesis 1-11 with its pre-nineteenth century historical roots, was predictable, inevitable, and necessary, and upset just about everybody. So something good did come out of the 1960s after-all.

Most late nineteenth century and early twentieth century evangelical scholars did accept some Darwinism, however, they drew the line at the creation of man. This was real history; evolution stopped there. The garden was real, the fall was real and historical. But the breach had been successful, the compromises made and blessed. It was only a matter of time, then, before neo-Darwinism would devour the historical Adam in its insatiable desire to reduce all reality to chance mutation, plus unnumbered eons of time, plus the omnipotence of natural selection that rivals God's. Which means that the best we can hope for in eleven chapters is a series of allegories telling us God is aware of us and cares for us. That should satisfy the warm and fuzzies in all of us. Then again, maybe not. Maybe it is just so much mythological nonsense. All allegory is arbitrary. Maybe my allegory is my way of trying to save Scripture from being considered nonsense. Once history is replaced by allegory, everyman is his own exegetical god. Move over Moses!

An Appeal to Past Authorities

All three of our critics appeal to a number of historical "authority" figures to buttress their arguments that past exegetes' understanding of Genesis was somehow different from the "wooden literalism" of modern Young Earth Creationism, and in fact, if one isolates and nuances some of their remarks, and extract them from their historical context, we may even find the seed of modern rational scientific

thought. When all is said and done, however, it is playing fast and loose with history for agenda purposes. Not a wise thing to do if one respects history.

But both Collins and Noll do appeal to one historical person to bolster their case for the priority of the hermeneutic of science that is an exception to the above and thus is worth spending some time with to see whether they have "used him" correctly as a rebuke to Young Earth Creationists. We are, of course speaking of Galileo Galilei (AD 1564-1642). He is hands-down the modern classical example of science-church confrontation, of science embarrassingly correcting, we might even say, forcing the church to abandon a broadly accepted, literal interpretation of Scripture in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus Collins has one reason for including Galileo and his confrontation with the Roman Catholic Church in his book, *The Language of God*:

So in this example, the scientific correctness of the heliocentric view won out despite theological objections. Today all faiths except perhaps a few primitive ones seem completely at home with this conclusion. The claim that heliocentricity contradicts the Bible are now seen to have been overstated, and the insistence on a literal interpretation of those particular scripture verses seem wholly unwarranted.⁵⁸

Collins wonders if this "harmonious" solution might not work to solve the "conflict between faith and the theory of evolution?" One thing is clear as far as Collins is concerned; "the Galileo affair demonstrates that a contentious chapter did eventually get resolved on the basis of overwhelming scientific evidence."⁵⁹ The only problem with Collins' Galileo conclusion is that it is wrong as we shall see! Historically speaking, the Galileo affair did little to advance the acceptance of heliocentric interpretation of the solar system. Nor did it "force" the abandonment of a literal interpretation of the contested verses. Collins is guilty of modern, scientific establishment, propaganda at this point.

Noll also appeals to Galileo, quoting him at length to show how far Young Earth Creationist have strayed from sound exegesis which consults with the best science of the day to inform the best theology. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say we should consult with the best science of the day on how best to interpret a given passage of Scripture. (Of course it has to be selectively applied, we can't carry this too far or we will have no historic resurrection of Jesus.)

As Noll's quote of Galileo is lengthy, I will simply summarize it. If one wishes to read the quote directly, they will find it on pages 205 and 206 in *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. The gist of it runs along these lines: While the Scriptures don't lie, their true meaning may be hard to discern because it may not be obvious from a literal interpretation. Therefore in "disputes about natural phenomena" one doesn't start with the Bible but with "sensory experience and necessary demonstration," (i.e., empirical demonstration). While God is revealed in both nature and Scripture, nature cannot violate "the terms of the Laws imposed on her..." whether we

understand them or not. On the other hand, "not every scriptural assertion is bound to obligations severe as every natural phenomena" Thus any natural phenomena that has been evaluated by "sensory experience or proved by necessary demonstration (i.e., empirically) should not be called into question, let alone condemned on account of scriptural passages whose words appear to have a different meaning." Galileo went on to assert that "to accommodate the understanding of the common people it is appropriate for scripture to say many things that are different (in appearance and in regard to the literal meaning of words) from the absolute truth...." Nevertheless, Galileo averred he had the highest regard for "Holy Scripture" and pointed out that "after becoming certain of some physical conclusions, we should use these as very appropriate aids to correct interpretation of scripture...."⁶⁰ (To understand Galileo's thinking at this point, it will help to remember that Galileo knew that heliocentrism was true and was challenging the Roman Catholic Church (his church) over this.)

In defense of his position, Galileo makes three assertions in this lengthy quote. One, a literal interpretation, even if it seems the best interpretation, may not give us the true meaning of a verse. Two, where empirical science and Scripture both address a natural phenomenon and disagree, then empirical science must prevail and even force a reinterpretation Scripture. Galileo's third assertion is his most disturbing and stems in part from his contempt toward the common folk of his day. They were, he believed, incorrigible when it came to understanding the truth of heliocentrism. In turn, this led him to believe that even though the biblical writers, themselves, knew better, they wrote as if the sun revolved around the earth so that the common folk would listen to them regarding more important spiritual matters.⁶¹ In other words, Galileo advocated an extreme accommodationism, even to the point that the Holy Spirit allowed (in non-essential areas) non-truthful statements to be presented as if they were truth (such as the sun seeming to revolve around the earth), so that God's central message, whatever it might be, would be heard by all—even the lowliest of the common folk.

It is easy to see why Galileo's assertions would be popular with neo-Darwinian evangelicals today. But the question that is not asked, the answer to which will render Galileo and his assertions superfluous in the heliocentric vs geocentric debate, and undermine his hero-martyr status among evangelical critics of Young Earth Creationism, is why he came to the conclusions he did, what forced him into such a radical position? And at this point it is important to know the whole story before jumping to ready-made, self-serving conclusions.

The Rest of the Story

The Council of Trent (AD 1545-1565), the Roman Catholic Church's official response to the Reformation, decreed, in reaction to the Protestant's *Sola Scriptura*, literally interpreted, that any "interpretation of Scripture that was contrary to the consensus of the Fathers" was in error. And as Cardinal Bellarmine (an extremely influential Cardinal within the Curia) noted in 1615, all the Fathers "took the passage

of the sun's motion literally" (i.e., as a Baconian fact).⁶² Bellarmine also asserted, referencing Eccl 5:4 (and rebuking Copernican advocates in the process), that Solomon, "the most learned man in human science and in knowledge of all created things," a wisdom straight from God, would "not likely...affirm something that went against some truth that was already demonstrated or was likely to be."⁶³

In other words, the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th and 17th centuries, in supposed conformity with the Church Fathers, believed the biblical authors, in turn inspired and authorized by the Holy Spirit, were making objective, Baconian-like, scientific statements of fact about nature rather than just recording a personal observation, when they noted that the sun seemed to move and the earth stand still. This belief, that these observations were scientific facts, was reinforced and affirmed by Ptolemaic astronomy which came to the fore in the second century AD. (A bit of mutual back scratching took place, I'm sure.) Actually, it could be said that the best science of the day and the best theology of the day dove-tailed nicely as Noll insists they should. The result was that the Roman Catholic Church, determined to thwart *Sola Scriptura* and keep the pope over Scripture, bound itself to support a horrendous scientific error and a horrendous exegetical error, and left poor Galileo frustrated and perpetuating some errors of his own trying to deal with it. It was this that Galileo was reacting to when he penned his extreme accommodationism quoted by Noll. He even tried a little imaginative exegesis on his own to try and side-step the insurmountable dilemma he faced.

In a long letter to a friend, written in 1615, Galileo attempted to interpret Psalm 19:5-8 scientifically rather than literally, based on his understanding of the sun's function and purpose. He did this in response to the popular claim that these verses discredited or "stood in the way of Copernican doctrine"⁶⁴ Galileo's discourse would be worth quoting in full were it not so lengthy, but for anyone interested, it is quoted in full in Stillman Drake's, *Galileo At Work: His Scientific Biography* (1978), page 248. But I do want to include a key sample so one might understand how Galileo hoped to show that those Scriptures which supposedly worked against heliocentrism, could actually be interpreted to support it. He took Psalm 19:5—"the sun proceedeth as a bridegroom from his chamber and exalt as a giant running his course"—and wrote the following:

I would understand this to be said of the radiant sun, that is of the light and of the above mentioned calorific spirit fertilizing all corporal substances, which, leaving from the solar body, is swiftly diffused throughout the entire world, to which meaning all the words are punctually fitted. And first, in the word "bridegroom" we have the fertilizing and prolific power, "exalted" applies to that emanation of those solar rays, made in a certain ways by jumps, as the sense clearly shows us; "as a giant" or "as a strong man" denotes the efficacious activity and power penetrating through all the bodies, and also the high speed moving through immense spaces, the emanation of this light being as if instantaneous. The words "goeth forth from his chamber" confirms that this

emanation and movement must refer to that solar light, and not to the body of the sun itself, since the body and globe of the sun is the recipient....⁶⁵

And on and on he goes. We can be grateful he didn't do too much of this. (When I read Noll's words that "no text yields to uncritical literal reading," it was like hearing the ghost of Galileo speak through him, for Galileo said it first!) It is no wonder he might irritate theologians within the Papal Curia. One can almost sympathize with them. What is so surprising is that both Galileo and so many within the Curia rejected, or it never occurred to them, the possibility that the authors of those verses in dispute were simply using a common observation (i.e., the sun moves across the sky from east to west) to glorify God or highlight His majesty and sovereignty over His creation, and that they meant nothing more with their words.

The problem that Galileo wrestled with, though I don't know if he was really aware of it, was not a science verses a literal interpretation of Scripture per se, but rather the Roman Catholic assertion that the Bible, as understood by the Church Fathers, was an infallible scientific text on natural phenomena, and as such confirmed geocentrism independent of, but in conjunction with, Ptolemaic astronomy. The confrontation, then, was between a long-established scientific "fact"—geocentrism—supported both by Ptolemaic astronomy and supposed scientific statements embedded in Scripture, and a new scientific theory, Copernican heliocentrism, which challenged the established geocentrism. However, it also challenged the Roman Catholic Church's interpretation of those Scriptures that seem to prove geocentrism. This challenge was unacceptable to the Papal Curia in light of counter-Reformation theological necessity; to thwart Protestant influence and to reassert that the church (spelled P-o-p-e) was over Scripture and not the other way around.

It is worth considering that had Galileo been Protestant, or even lived in a Protestant country such as England or Holland, he would have been spared the humiliating persecution the Roman Catholic Church visited upon him. Had he used the Protestant's historical-grammatical hermeneutic he would have avoided the bizarre accommodationism that marred his understanding of the Bible. For it was a Protestant astronomer, Johannes Kepler (AD 1571-1630), who harmonized Copernican astronomy with Scripture without compromising or distorting either one, and in the process destroyed forever the "myth" that the Galileo incident was a clash between science and a backward, ignorant Christianity that would not let go of a foolish insistence that certain Scriptures be interpreted with a "wooden literalism." Alas, though, the myth was too useful to the 19th century American Rationalists in their war on Christianity so it was revived and used in all its distorted glory. (For example, Andrew Dickson White, in his *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* (1910), devoted 18 pages to the church's "war on Galileo"). Interestingly, neither Noll or Collins (or Osborn for that matter) seem aware of Kepler. One can only wonder why in light of his tremendous accomplishment?

Historian Kenneth Howell, in his book, *God's Two Books* (2002), an excellent work on many of the astronomers of this period and how they exegeted Scripture, speaks

highly of Kepler the scientist. The "Copernican revolution," Howell writes, could justifiably "be properly called Keplerian." Although Galileo is better known, "his actual astronomical achievement was meager compared to that of Kepler."⁶⁶

Kepler, (I believe), was also a better exegete of Scripture, having studied theology for a year and a half at Tübingen University. And he also was a Protestant—Lutheran—which allowed him greater freedom when exegeting Scripture. Like the Roman Catholic Church in the early 1600s, Protestants were debating the pros and cons of Copernican heliocentrism as heatedly, but more openly than were the Catholics. The difference was that Protestants believed in *Sola Scriptura* literally interpreted. This meant close attention would be paid to authorial intent, language and grammar usage, and context or genre. It also meant the Protestant exegete did not have to yield authority to an Inquisition, an Index, the Papal Curia, an overbearing Pope, a sacred tradition, a Council of Trent, or what the Church Fathers believed about a particular verse. All was to be submitted to the authority of Scripture literally interpreted. If they agreed, well and good, if not, they were to be ignored.

Kepler was well versed in this methodology, and in the introduction to his *Astronomia Nova* (1609), we are exposed to his approach to those Scriptures that seem to support geocentrism and nix Copernican astronomy. In his analysis of the Scriptures in dispute, Kepler did not deny the literalness of these verses, but instead focused on authorial intent—was it the intent of the authors of these Scriptures to teach "physics" (i. e., science). He began by noting that "we acquire most of our information...through the sense of sight" and this affects our choice of words. "Thus," he wrote, "many times each day we speak in accordance with the sense of sight, although we are quite certain that the truth of the matter is otherwise."⁶⁷ He offered a verse from Virgil's *Aeneid* as an example: "we are carried from the port, and the land and cities recede." Kepler also noted that the "writers of all nations use the word 'solstice' even though they in fact deny that the sun stands still."⁶⁸

Kepler's point in discussing the way vision can deceive us and affect our choice of words was to show:

Now the Holy Scriptures, too, when treating common things (concerning which it is not their purpose to instruct humanity), speak with humans in a human manner, in order to be understood by them. They make use of what is generally acknowledged, in order to weave in other things more lofty and divine.

No wonder, then, if scripture also speaks in accordance with human perception when the truth of things is at odds with the senses whether or not humans are aware of this.⁶⁹

Kepler then offered a number of examples from Scripture to support his assertion in order to pose the following question:

If this [the above] be easily accepted, why can it not also be accepted that in other passages usually cited in opposition to the earth's motion we should likewise turn eyes from physics [i.e., astronomy] to the aims of scripture?⁷⁰

He next gave an example of what he has in mind taken from Ecclesiastes 1:4-7 (the very set of verses Cardinal Bellarmine used to deny Copernicus). Considering the verses, Kepler asked, "Does it seem here as if Solomon wanted to argue with the astronomers?"⁷¹ Was that his intent? "No," Kepler responded, "rather he wanted to warn men of their own mutability....Life's tale is ever the same; there is nothing new under the sun."⁷² Kepler went on to point out that there is no discussion of "physical dogma" in Solomon's discourse. "The message is a moral one," concerning lessons drawn from everyday life that we usually ignore. Solomon encourages us to stop and consider them. "So Solomon," Kepler concluded, "by mentioning what is evident to all, warns of that which almost everyone wrongly neglects."⁷³

Having neutralized Solomon as a teacher of geocentric astronomy, Kepler next turned to Psalm 104 because those favoring geocentrism claimed that this Psalm was "a physical discussion" from first to last and thus proved geocentrism. Kepler could not have disagreed more. "But in fact," he wrote:

Nothing could be farther from the psalmist's intention than speculation about physical causes. For the whole thing is an exaltation upon the greatness of God, who made all things; the author has composed a hymn to God the creator, in which he treats the world in order, as it appears to the eyes.⁷⁴

Kepler considered Psalm 104 a praise commentary on the first six days of creation, and he gave considerable space to analyzing it from that perspective. Along the way he noted that the author:

Does not wish to teach things of which men are ignorant, but to recall to mind something they neglect, namely, God's greatness and potency in a creation of such magnitude, so solid and stable. If an astronomer teaches that the earth is carried through the heavens, he is not spurning what the psalmist says here, nor does he contradict human experience.⁷⁵

Kepler concluded his lengthy evaluation of the author's intent by pointing out that the author

Tells nothing that is not generally acknowledged, because his purpose was to praise things that are known, not to seek out the unknown. It was his wish to invite men to consider the benefits accruing to them from each of these works of the six days.⁷⁶

Kepler completed his exegetical study of the disputed verses with an indirect slap at the Roman Catholic Church's assertion that the Church Fathers' take on these Scriptures was infallible. "So much for the authority of holy scripture," he concluded:

As for the opinion of the pious on these matters of nature, I have just one thing to say: while in theology it is authority that carries the most weight in philosophy [i.e., science] it is reason. Therefore, Lactantius is pious, who denied that the earth is round, Augustine is pious, who, though admitting the roundness denied the antipodes, and the Inquisition nowadays is pious, which, though allowing the earth's smallness, denies its motion. To me, however, the truth is more pious still, and (with all due respect for the Doctors of the Church) I prove philosophically not only that the earth is round, not only that it is inhabited all the way around at the antipodes, not only that it is contemptibly small, but also that it is carried along among the stars.⁷⁷

I have given Kepler considerable space in order to note the contrast between Galileo and Kepler regarding Scripture. Kepler did not pit science against Scripture. As far as he was concerned, there was no conflict. Nor did he accuse God of placing things in Scripture that were not true (especially if taken literally). In determining whether Bible teaches geocentrism, Kepler determined such was not the case based upon an analysis of authorial intent and context. He then showed what the authors did intend. His conclusions are reasonable, do not strain the text, and are rooted in sound Reformation exegesis. He did not abandon a literal approach to Scripture to reach his conclusions, nor did he allegorize a straight-forward statement found in Scripture. And just because the Bible was written in common, everyday language did not mean it was not true or accurate in the sense intended by the author. Kepler neither compromised his science nor his Bible. Most importantly, he effectively removed Scripture from the controversy and made it a confrontation between competing astronomical theories. This made it easier, I am convinced, for Copernican astronomy to win out and more quickly find acceptance among Protestants.

The translator into English of the version of Kepler's *Astronomia Nova* I consulted, William Donahue, comments in a footnote that Kepler's

Arguments on the interpretation of scripture were to become the most widely read of Kepler's writings. They were often reprinted from the seventeenth century on, and translated into modern languages. Indeed, this part of the Introduction was the only work of Kepler's to appear in English before 1700.⁷⁸

The Papal Curia, and Galileo himself, were aware by 1624 of the progress of the acceptance of Copernican astronomy among Protestants. Galileo recorded a conversation he had with Cardinal Zollern (of Germany) in 1624. (Note this was 15 years after *Astronomia Nova* was published.) "Zollern left yesterday for Germany," Galileo wrote, "and he told me he had spoken to His Holiness about Copernicus, and mentioned that the heretics [Protestants] are all of this opinion

and hold it as most certain, and that we should therefore proceed very circumspectly in coming to any determination"⁷⁹

Late in that same year, Galileo wrote his *Reply to Ingoli* (Ingoli was a Jesuit who had written a vicious anti-Copernican tract in 1616), to make the point that "as a good son of the church, he wanted Protestants to know that Catholics were not all ignoramuses like Ingoli."⁸⁰ Nevertheless, Galileo was indeed too good a son of the Roman Catholic Church to openly question anti-Protestant edicts or faulty exegesis on the part of Catholic theologians or councils. Instead he came up with a bizarre accommodation that today only a neo-Darwinian evangelical could love. Thus it fell to Protestants like Kepler to accomplish the task of bringing victory to Copernican astronomy and proving at the same time that Scripture, literally interpreted, was not in conflict with science.

So why is Kepler ignored and Galileo made the hero? Possible because Galileo, despite his serious errors, offers the historical support neo-Darwinians need in their stress on the priority of the hermeneutic of science. Galileo's three assertions offer today's neo-Darwinists the perfect approach to Genesis 1-11 they need in light of their evolutionary convictions, sound exegesis and the historical record notwithstanding. So along with a series of rambling allegories disguised as history in the Bible, the neo-Darwinian evangelical gives us the real history of earth and man's beginnings, the sordid truths of a hideously wasteful, brutal, cruel, even sadistic, deep-time evolution, and a God that chose such a system over *ex nihilo* creation, and then had the audacity to call it "very good." Really? A new Genesis is replacing the old. The only question is, is it inspired by the Holy Spirit as was the original? Who determines this and on whose or what authority? Perhaps we need another Council of Trent to declare it so. Only this time only neo-Darwinian evangelicals can attend and vote! Will the results be just as erroneous and just as crippling toward Scripture as was the first Trent?

A Summation

It is time for a summation of sorts to be drawn up. If the goal of Noll, or Collins, or Osborn was/is to discredit those who hold to a historical, real-time Adam and garden and fall, that the Young Earth Creationists are somehow out of step with church history, or how the church has understood Genesis 1-11 throughout history, or that they are in danger of imitating the 17th century Catholic Curia in being anti-scientific, then to any fair-minded person, they have failed miserably. Careful historical investigation shows that their charges cannot be sustained. Even the Galileo fiasco is an empty cupboard. If I am to choose who is the better man to imitate, Kepler or Galileo, I will choose Kepler. When it comes to interpreting Scripture, Galileo is hardly one to follow. And, I believe, because he did believe in *Sola Scriptura*, literally interpreted, Kepler held Scripture in higher regard than did Galileo. So why are unsustainable arguments, along with a plethora of *ad hominem* labels, made to discredit those who believe Genesis 1-11 is true history, and a historical Adam absolutely necessary if Christianity is to have any historical, real-time validity? Why is history misused or

misrepresented? Why is the historical-grammatical hermeneutic, so popular among conservative evangelicals, never mentioned as a factor in how they understand Genesis 1-11? These are unavoidable questions—one the readers, perhaps, must answer given the response found in this essay.

One thing I will say. It is the present evangelical proponents of neo-Darwinism that are out of step with the historical church and its exegesis of Genesis 1-11. It is the proponents of neo-Darwinism who must explain away the clear affirmations of the historicity of Genesis 1-11 so easily and plentifully found in the New Testament. It is the neo-Darwinists who seem to be going to extremes and denying the necessities of Christian history with their allegories, not the Young Earth Creationists. If I were to give them a bit of advice, I would tell them that if they are going to be effective in their criticism of Young Earth Creationists, their arguments must be more credible, especially their historical arguments, than those I have evaluated in this essay.

A Final Afterthought

When all is said and written, everything boils down to two key issues. One is the question of whether neo-Darwinism is a hard science on the same level as the astronomy of the Solar System? Is it empirically demonstrable and/or subject to repeated experimentation? Collins, Noll, and Osborn would, I think, probably claim yes, and a majority of academic evangelicals might line up with them. But despite such wholesale, redundant conformity, they can, in fact, offer no hard, demonstrable proof to support their faith. What they assert cannot be tested in a laboratory nor is it presently observable in nature.⁸¹ Stephen Myer, of the Discovery Institute, in his new book, *Darwin's Doubt* (2013), a book I would recommend all conservative evangelicals read whether they agree with his intelligent design theory or not, closely details the rising tide of doubt developing from within the neo-Darwinian establishment itself. So numerous has become the criticism that Myer writes, "...the neo-Darwinian theory of biological evolution has reached an impasse nearly as acute as the one faced by chemical evolution theory."⁸² This leads Myers to write that the statement of evolutionists, that even if "we don't know how evolution occurred" ...we are not justified in doubting "about whether it occurred" is no longer valid.⁸³ Given the host of undemonstrable assumptions buttressing neo-Darwinism, it has become a faith claim rather than one that is scientifically sustainable. If nothing else, Myer's research shows that Collins' criticism and airy dismissal of Young Earth Creationists and Intelligent Design advocates made in his book, *The Language of God*, was overstated and premature.

Evangelicals who have jettisoned the historicity of Genesis 1-11 for the historicity of neo-Darwinism may be the unwitting enemies of historic/biblical Christianity, not the Young Earth Creationists. Certainly it is unwarranted and destructive of sound biblical interpretation to embrace Galileo's desperate and erroneous assertions, and abandon the obvious authorial intent that Genesis 1-11 was real history.

The other Key issue, and by far the most crucial, is the issue of origins and man's early history. In fact, the issue before us is not one of science versus Scripture but one of history vs history. Which historical narrative of man's origins and early history is correct—neo-Darwinism or Genesis 1-11? Everything hinges on this. We have reached a point where compromise is no longer possible without radically changing the foundation of historic/biblical Christianity into a gnostic myth. Historically, Jesus and his redemptive work cannot be severed from Adam and his fall from righteousness into sin. There can be no such thing as a theological Adam apart from an historical Adam any more than there can be a theological atonement apart from an historical atonement. All the truths of Christianity rest upon this historically required, real-time continuity. We have also reached the point where we can no longer say it isn't important whether Genesis 1-11 is taken literally or not—what is important is the gospel. Well, now it is important! Without an historic Adam and Eve the historic/biblical gospel collapses.

Nevertheless, based on his uncompromising belief that neo-Darwinism is true truth based on genetic studies, Collins asserts that Genesis two and three is "a poetic and powerful allegory of God's plan for the entrance of the spiritual nature (the soul) and the moral law into humanity."⁸⁴ One can only hope, like Kepler, but unlike Galileo, that Collins did a thorough study of Genesis, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and comparing the first eleven chapters of Genesis with the rest of Genesis to ascertain true authorial intent. If he did not do this on whose authority does he declare Genesis chapters two and three allegorical? His own? What criteria or guidelines did he use? It is not clear. What he does say is that "the first few chapters of Genesis, the book of Job, the Song of Solomon, and the Psalms, have a more lyrical allegorical *flavor*, and do not generally seem to carry the *mark* of pure historical narrative."⁸⁵ (italics mine) Elsewhere in his book, *The Language of God*, he asserts that "many sacred texts do indeed carry the clear mark of eyewitness history.... Others, such as the story of Job and Jonah, Adam and Eve, frankly do not carry the same *historical ring*."⁸⁶ (italics mine) My problem with Collins' words is that I don't know what the flavor of allegory tastes like, nor do I recognize what the sound of the historical ring sounds like that will inform me that a document is a genuine historical narrative. Are these really the intellectual criteria necessary to discern authorial intent in Scripture? But I do not think Collins is paying much attention to me or my questions. He has made it clear that he considers such as I intellectually bankrupt, both in science and theology.⁸⁷

With tongue firmly in cheek, I don't know whether I should consider this the unkindest cut of all, or whether Osborn should be given that honor for declaring that I have a mental disorder—"Identity foreclosure!"⁸⁸ Of course, this may be going a bit too far, and may tell us more about the author's mind-set rather than about the mental status of Young Earth Creationists. Still, maybe I should enjoy my mental aberration while I can. There ought to be something in there I can profit from at the ripe old age of 78. Then again, maybe I should reserve the honor for the unkindest cut for Noll. He words his criticisms well and now and then with persuasive effect. Recall what he wrote:

...if the consensus of modern scientists, who devote their lives to looking at the data of the physical world, is that humans have existed on the planet for a very long time, it is foolish for the biblical interpreter to say "the Bible teaches" the recent creation of human beings.⁸⁹

One isn't simply wrong to interpret Genesis chapters two and three historically, it isn't just poor exegesis for ignoring the priority of the hermeneutic of science, and the possibility that Genesis 1-11 is an extended allegory, it is foolish—one is playing the fool. Hmmm. Well that is what I believe Genesis 1-11 teaches and I'm pretty much in line with the church historically in this regard. Now what? Am I considered an enemy of the cross because, taking the Bible at face value, that is, literally, I consider *historically necessary those events that necessitated the cross*? In overseeing the composition of the Bible, did the Holy Spirit consider them necessary also? If not, why did he include them as if they were historically real? Was the Holy Spirit patronizing us because of our incorrigibility in handling the truth, like the common folk in Galileo's day?

And imagine, if you will, for a moment, and only for a moment because no evangelical, not even neo-Darwinian evangelicals, want to go this far, but imagine what it would be like if we consistently applied the priority of the hermeneutic of science across the board biblically, even to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Supposed witnesses notwithstanding, many a Rationalist has questioned the reality of such an event and tried to explain it away with secular interpretations. How many versions of the swoon theory are there? And have we forgotten *The Da Vinci Code* already?) What would be the results? Why, we should all very soon now be worshipping a phantom Jesus who has theologically resurrected from the dead but not historically or literally. But what a great allegory it makes!

I must admit to be a Young Earth Creationists these days is to live dangerously for we are the theological equivalents of Bret Hart's "Outcast of Poker Flats."⁹⁰ One never knows what *ad hominem* arrow or mangled historical missile, or off-the-wall presuppositional dart will be launched our way with the intent of doing us and Genesis literal harm. What are we to do? Well, to be charitable and have a good sense of humor will offer some protection. Holding fast to *Sola Scriptura* literally interpreted will do the rest.

All things considered, it is time to do some serious thinking. I'm not sure conservative evangelicals are completely aware yet of what is going on, and many may not want to. But let me, in so many words, repeat what I wrote at the beginning. The issue goes beyond just simply whether Genesis is historical and real or simply allegorical. There is an outright assault on conservative, biblical evangelical Christianity. For a comparison (with only slight historical stretching), we can go as far back as the second century AD when the Gnostics of the time tried to cop orthodox or Biblical Christianity, and negate it's historicity. In defeating the Gnostics of that century, the Young Earth Creationist, Irenaeus (AD 120-202?), insisted on the necessary historicity of both the first Adam as well as the Second. In fact, the historical actions of the first Adam as recorded in Genesis, necessitated the historical appearing

and historical actions of the second Adam as recorded in the New Testament. Modern Young Earth Creationists are doing the same in the face of a new, 21st century Gnosticism—neo-Darwinism. Those who embrace modern neo-Darwinism as the true history of origins and man's early history are determined to capture and reinterpret Christianity in conformity with their neo-Darwinian beliefs—beliefs that deny any real history to the first eleven chapters of Genesis. In conjunction with that desire, as this essay has shown, they seem also determined to intellectually discredit those conservative evangelical Christians that disagree with them. If we do not understand the dimensions of the war we are engaged in, we are already halfway to oblivion. The theological and historical real-time implications are staggering and life-altering.

End Notes:

1. Dean E. Arnold, "Why Are There So Few Christian Anthropologists? Reflections on the Tensions between Christianity and Anthropology." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, Vol. 58, No. 4, December 2006, 252.
2. *Ibid.*, 272.
3. Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 178. But see in a brief reply, Marvin Olasky, "Married to Darwin," (<http://townhall.com/columnists/marvinolasky/2014/07/08/married-to-darwin-n1859655>). Accessed 7/9/2014.
4. *Ibid.*, 177, 178. Also see Ronald E. Osborn, *Death Before the Fall: Biblical Literalism and the Problem of Animal Suffering* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 18, 19. Also Olasky, 1 and 2.
5. Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 232.
6. Collins, 177.
7. Osborn, 82.
8. *Ibid.*, 72.
9. The five Fundamentals as they were called, were put forward by the Northern Presbyterians at their 1910 general assembly. One had to affirm these as true to be considered a genuine Christian. They were 1) the inerrancy of Scripture, 2) the virgin birth, 3) the "satisfactory" theory of the atonement, 4) the resurrection of Jesus in or with the same body he possessed at the time of His death on the cross,

- 5) the miracles of Jesus as given in the gospel accounts.
10. Olasky, 1 and 2.
 11. Osborn, 32 and 58.
 12. Ibid., 19.
 13. Noll, 207.
 14. Collins, 207.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid., 175
 17. Ibid.
 18. Noll, 197.
 19. Ibid., 199.
 20. Ibid., 207.
 21. Osborn, 74, 75.
 22. Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 163.
 23. *Luther's Works, Lectures on Genesis*, Vol. 1, Chapters 1-5, Jaroslav Pelikan, ed. (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), 3.
 24. Ibid., 5.
 25. "The Hexameron," *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Viii, Philip Schaff and Henry Wale, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), 101.
 26. Ibid.
 27. Ibid., 101,102.
 28. Grant Hornor, email to the author, October 14, 2014. The source of the quote is Ian P. Hazlett, "Calvin's Latin Preface to his Proposed French Edition of Chrysostom's Homilies: Translation and Commentary," in James Kirk (ed.),

Humanism and Reform: The Church in Europe, England and Scotland, 1400-1643 (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 145, 146.

29. Ibid.
30. Noll, 199, 207.
31. Bill Crouse and Gorden Franz, "Mount Cudi—True Mountain of Noah's Ark," *The Bible and Spade*, 19:4 (2006), 105, 106.
32. "Theodore of Mopsuestia: Commentary on Galatians 4:22-31," *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church*, trans. and ed., Karlfried Froehlich (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 96, 97.
33. Ibid., 97.
34. Collins, 199, 200.
35. Osborn, 100-104.
36. Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagan*, Trans. Eva Matthews Sanford and William McAllen Green (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), ??
37. Saint Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Vol. 1, Bks. 1-6, Translated and Annotated by John Hammond Taylor, S.J. (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 42.
38. Augustine, *City of God*, 217.
39. Ibid., 221.
40. Ibid., 581.
41. Osborn, 76.
42. Ibid., 77, 81.
43. Collins, 207.
44. Ibid., 210.
45. Ibid., 207.
46. Osborn, 66, 67.
47. Ibid., 57.

48. Ibid.
49. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: W. W. Woodward, 1821), 143.
50. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, Ed-in-Chief, David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 464-466.
51. Noll, 232.
52. Collins, 207.
53. *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 466.
54. Noll, 199.
55. Ibid., 206.
56. Ibid., 185, 186.
57. Ibid., 183, 184.
58. Collins, 156.
59. Ibid.
60. Noll, 205, 206.
61. William R. Shea and Mariano Artigas, *Galileo in Rome: The Rise and Fall of Troublesome Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57 and 73.
62. Ibid. Also Stillman Drake, *Galileo at Work: His Scientific Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 224, 225, and "Letter to the Grand Duchess," in *The Galileo Affair: A Documentary History*, Maurice A. Finocchiaro, editor and translator (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 106, 107.
63. Shea and Artigas, 69.
64. Drake, 246.
65. Ibid., 248.
66. Kenneth Howell, *God's Two Books: Copernican Cosmology and Biblical Interpretation in Early Modern Science* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2002), 109.

67. Johannes Kepler, *New Astronomy [Astronomia Nova]*, trans. William H. Donohue (Cambridge, G. B.: Cambridge University Press, (1609), 1992), 59.
68. Ibid., 59, 60.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid., 63.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid.
75. Ibid., 64.
76. Ibid., 65.
77. Ibid., 66.
78. Ibid., footnote 16, 59.
79. Shea and Artigas, 86.
80. Ibid., 115, 116.
81. For example, see Lynn Margulis and Dorion Sagan, *Acquiring Genomes: A Theory of the Origin of Species* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 28-33, 39, and Henry Gee, *Deep Time: Cladistics. The Revolution in Evolution* (London: Fourth Estate Limited, 2002), 2, 5, 8. Both of these books were written over a decade before Stephen Myer's book. See endnote 81.
82. Stephen Myer, *Darwin's Doubt: The Explosive Origin of Animal Life and the Case for Intelligent Design* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2013), ix.
83. Ibid.
84. Collins, 207.
85. Collins, 175.
86. Ibid., 209.

87. Ibid., 177.
88. Osborn, 92.
89. Noll, 207.
90. Bret Hart was a poet and writer of western short stories right around the turn of the 20th century. "The Outcast of Poker Flats" is probably his most famous. It is a morality play of sorts. If you haven't read it you should.