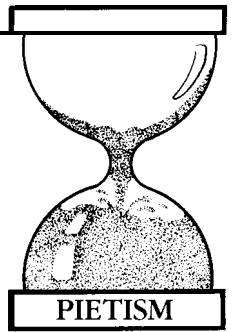


# Dispensationalism in Transition

Challenging Traditional Dispensationalism's "Code of Silence"



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## SOFT-CORE CREATIONISM

by Gary North

*For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore, the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it (Ex. 20:11).*

Well, there it is, right in the middle of the Ten Commandments: **God created the world in six days.** He rested the seventh day. He hallowed this day, meaning that He set it apart. The very structure of the week is supposed to reflect the six days and one day pattern of God's first week. It is as clear as the nose on your face. From the early days of the Christian church, its Bible-believing religious leaders taught no other view of creation. Augustine wrote in the *City of God* concerning those people who believe in a long history of the earth: "They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to give the history of many thousand years, though, reckoning by the sacred writings, we find that not 6000 years have yet passed" (XII. 10). Mendacity, indeed!

Such was the opinion of orthodox Christians for almost seventeen centuries. And then, in the late 1600's, opinions began to change. As men began to study the geologic column in detail, they began to conclude that the world is much older than had previously been believed by Christians, though of course all religions not tied to the Old Testament had always denied that history is so short. The pagan presuppositions of all anti-biblical religions began to seep into the church through sedimentary rocks, as it were.

For fifty years prior to the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, Christian intellectuals steadily abandoned faith in a literal six-day creation. They extended the time frame of what was considered acceptable regarding biblical chronology. Writes evolutionist Michael Ruse:

However, by 1859, even in Victorian Britain, nearly all intelligent and informed people realized that one could no longer hold to a traditional, Biblically inspired picture of the world: a world created by God in six days (of twenty-four hours each); a world of very, very recent origin (4004 B.C. was the favored date of creation, based on genealogies of the Bible); and, a world which at some subsequent point had been totally covered and devastated by a monstrous flood. Through the first half of the nineteenth century, scientific discovery after scientific discovery had modified these traditional beliefs.<sup>1</sup>

Darwin, of course, opened the floodgates of religious skepticism. A good example of the erosion of faith is the 1925 statement of Rev. James Maurice Wilson:

Is it not evident that the vast change of our conception of the created universe has affected in general men's thought of the Creator? What was conceivable, credible, and fully believed by early Semites, as to the nature of a God ruling a small tribe in what was thought to be the sole created world – a conception long accepted on their authority – became inconceivable, incredible, and is frankly disbelieved in presence of the infinities of space now known to us. Our Christian conception of God, adopted from Jewish tradition, was in fact small and childish; and it was of a kind that would not bear indefinite expansion. It was stretched, and stretched, till it burst like a bubble and disappeared.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the educated young people were, I think, in that stage of thought in November, 1859. We were, as I have said, evolutionists at heart. We had begun to realize the immense extent of the Sidereal Universe. It was incomparably more to us than it was to the writer of the first chapter of Genesis, who added incidentally that God "made the stars also". Lyell and others had also familiarized us with the age of the earth, its slow and gradual formation, and the long succession of forms of life on it.<sup>3</sup>

The immensity of the universe no longer impressed these evolutionists with the majesty of God the Creator. Instead, they interpreted the size of the universe in terms of the supposedly impersonal, meaningless processes of immense, untreated time. God was shoved out of their mental universe. The result was predictable: the eventual decline of biblical orthodoxy.

### Scofield's Shuffle

You might imagine that by 1900, every orthodox Christian scholar would have recognized the tight connection between the evolutionists' geological time frame and their rejection of biblical truth. You would be wrong. Virtually no leading theologian in any orthodox camp was steadfast in his defense of Bishop Ussher's chronology or anything remotely resembling it.

Into this wasteland came lawyer C. I. Scofield and his reference notes in 1909. Beginning with his notes on Genesis 1:1, he gave away the biblical case for creationism. In

1. Michael Ruse, *Darwinism Defended: A Guide to the Evolution Controversies* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1982), pp. 285-86

2. James Maurice Wilson, "The Religious Effect of the Idea of Evolution," in *Evolution in the Light of Modern Knowledge: A Collective Work* (London: Blackie & Son, 1925), p. 466.

3. Ibid., p. 488.

note 4, he wrote: "The first creative act refers to the dateless past, and gives scope for all the geologic ages." This is exactly what the besieged defenders of the Bible had been arguing for over a century, and each generation saw them pushed into the wilderness of ever-greater compromise.

He adopted the so-called "gap" theory of creation. In between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, there was a gap of an indeterminate period – in fact, a gap just long enough to allow Christians to fill in the latest theories of the geologic time frame. This supposedly removed from Christian scholars the necessity of dealing with biblical chronology prior to Adam. What such a strategy could not do, however, was to remove the stigma of a biblical account of creation that placed the creation of the sun, moon, and stars after the creation of the earth (Gen. 1:14-15). This problem passage was what led Rev. Wilson to sneer concerning the immensity of the universe, "It was incomparably more to us than it was to the writer of the first chapter of Genesis, who added incidentally that God 'made the stars also'."

Who would have invented the gap theory if uniformitarian theories of the geologic column had never appeared, or if Darwinism had never appeared? No one. It is obviously a half-hearted, half-baked attempt to escape one problem, fossils, without solving the really difficult exegetical problem for someone who accepted any aspect of uniformitarianism's geologic time frame: the age of the earth in relation to the age of the sun.

Henry M. Morris has called attention to the harm that Scofield's notes on the creation produced:

While anti-evolutionism was strong among the fundamentalists, almost none of their leaders questioned Lyellian uniformitarianism and the geological-age system. The Scofield Reference Bible, originally published in 1909, had actually incorporated both these theories in its notes, **while at the same time ignoring the critically important question of the universality of the Flood, and it had a tremendous impact on fundamentalists in many denominations.**<sup>4</sup>

### Scofield Lives!

In the New *Scofield Reference Bible* (1967), the editors kept all of the worst features of the Scofield notes on creation. It retains at least part of note 4, "The first creative act refers to the dateless past." It drops the words, "and gives scope for all the geologic ages." This does not indicate any change in opinion on the part of the editors; it only covers up one of Scofield's more blatant concessions to uniformitarian geology. In note 2, they insist, "Scripture gives no data for determining how long ago the universe was created." It refers the reader to a note to Genesis 5:3: "Scripture does not reveal the exact date of Adam's creation." It then refers the reader to a note to Genesis 11:10: "Scripture does not provide data by which the date

of the flood can be discovered."

Here is the game all the chronology compromisers play. First, they tell us that Scripture cannot give us the **exact** date of the creation, Adam, or the flood. Second, they sit passively while the evolutionists drive a chronological truck through this gap that carries a cosmic time scale of **20 billion years**, give or take five billion. In fact, the compromisers deliberately invented this tactic of "insufficient Scriptural exactness" in order to allow the evolutionists to drive their truck right through the church. They are like children playing a game of **dodge-a-truck** on a freeway, yelling, "Nyah, Nyah, you can't hit us!" This game always produces piles of dead bodies – personal, ecclesiastical, and educational – that are scattered all over the landscape.

In a 1982 book published by dispensationalist Moody Press, a group of dispensational scholars paid tribute to John Walvoord, the long-time president of Dallas Theological Seminary. Frederick R. Howe contributed an essay, "Creation and Evolution: The Continuing Confrontation." He listed four features of the biblical account of creation: 1) creation by a sovereign, triune God; 2) creation by divine fiat; 3) creation with boundaries (e.g., the concept of **kind**); 4) the accomplished work of creation, i.e., creation distinguished from providence.<sup>5</sup>

All well and good, but hardly complete. The gaping hole ("gap") in his list is the doctrine of six-day creationism. The intellectual leaders of the dispensationalist movement continue to pay ultimate tribute to its major American distributor, lawyer Scofield, who naively sold out the movement to the evolutionists in 1909.

### Conclusion

Should we be surprised to learn that Moody Press refused to publish Morris and Whitcomb's *The Genesis Flood* (1961) because it insisted on a six-literal-day creation scheme?<sup>6</sup> Should we be surprised that Dallas Theological Seminary has never offered a course defending the six-literal-day creation? On this fundamental doctrine of the faith, no seminary today offers a clarion call. They are all embarrassed by Genesis 1. None has built a curriculum around this crucial doctrine. Dallas is no worse than the others, but no better. Its financial supporters should demand much better. But they are afraid to insist that creationism be defended. Laymen still sit silent, and they continue to send in their checks. This has been going on for over half a century.

Henry Morris is a fundamentalist and a dispensationalist. He has waged a lifelong defense of six-day creationism, and he has yet to convert a single seminary. He is the odd man out in modern dispensationalism, however. Scofield set the standard of dispensational compromise in 1909, and the vast majority of his academically certified followers have not departed from the received tradition. The sell-out continues.

4. Henry M. Morris, *History of Modern Creationism* (San Diego, California: Master Book Publishers, 1984), pp. 58-59.

5. Donald K. Campbell (ed.), *Walvoord: A Tribute* (Chicago) Moody Press, 1982), pp. 146-47.

6. Morris, *History of Modern Creationism*, p. 154.