

# **EVANGELICAL REVIEW OF THEOLOGY**

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## p. 165 **Editorial Searching for Roots**

Four hundred years ago the Jesuit Matteo Ricci began his missionary career in China. He is best remembered for his accommodating attitude to ancestor practices. Later his views were vigorously opposed by the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries who won the support of Rome; a position that was upheld until modified by Pius XII in 1939. Early in the Protestant missionary era in China, William Martin and Hudson Taylor advocated radically different approaches to the problem. The debate still continues. At the recent evangelical consultation on A Christian Response to Ancestor Practices, though all agreed ancestor worship was contrary to Scripture, there were sharp differences of opinion on the boundary between filial piety and ancestor practices. Some argued for viable functional substitutes, others rejected all forms of the traditions including the keeping of genealogies and tomb sweeping ceremonies.

Idolatry takes subtle forms and its symbols differ from culture to culture. For some it is bowing before the photo of a deceased mother, for others it may be saluting the national flag. Boasting of church statistics, evangelism campaign successes or even missionary budgets may be just as much idolatrous as burning incense before the family shrine—if it means glorifying man rather than God. Idolatry begins in the heart, the practices are only the symptoms. The desire to be independent of God and attempts to manipulate Him is in the root of all idolatrous sin.

Searching for culture roots may be a blessing or a curse; it depends on the motives. Paul confessed to the Corinthian church ‘I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words but with a demonstration of the Spirit’s power, so that your faith might not rest on men’s wisdom but on God’s power’. [1 Cor. 2:3–5](#). Symbols need careful explanation for, as with Biblical parables, they either hide the truth to those whose minds are hardened or reveal it to those who have ears to hear. Only those, who with mind and heart follow Christ in the way of the Cross, will have the wisdom to distinguish between true and false practices and the power to obey the Spirit’s guidance even when it is contrary to popular opinion.

Several articles in this issue of ERT speak to aspects of this problem. p. 166

## **Dare We Re-Interpret Genesis?**

David C. C. Watson

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*With this issue of ERT we begin a new section dedicated to exegesis and interpretation of Scripture. We invite our readers to submit or to recommend expository sermons or articles dealing with important issues of interpretation. In this article the author challenges the non-literal interpretation of [Genesis 1–11](#).*

(Editors)

'Tracing the future of the Universe from the present onward is not nearly so hard [as tracing the past]: we do not need any new way of looking at the world. All that we really need to plot out our future are a few good measurements'.

James S. Trefil, *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 1983

So runs a recent challenge from the humanist camp. Do you see what has happened? Completely self-assured about their (Big Bang) theory of the world's beginning, they now assert with equal intrepidity their predictions about the world's end. God is not invited or involved—even as spectator! But at least they are logical and consistent: the godless overture is matched with a godless finale. A much stranger phenomenon today is Christians who profess to believe what God says about the end of the world (Last Judgement, Heaven, etc.), but at the same time refuse to accept what He has said about its beginning.

## HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

Before we take a closer look at the *Guideposts* article (CT, October 1982) it may be well to remind ourselves that re-interpretation of Scripture is an old game. 'Full well you reject the commandment of God that you may keep your own tradition ... you hold the tradition of men ... making the word of God of none effect through your tradition which you have handed down ...' ([Mark 7](#)). We find this attitude of Christ to the Old Testament uniformly consistent throughout his ministry. In his answers to the devil, to enquirers about divorce, about the sabbath, about eternal life, and on a dozen other occasions, *He never re-interpreted* Scripture. He simply quoted the words as being in themselves perspicuous, intelligible, and meaningful, in the plain sense of common speech. Why did this offend the Pharisees? They were certainly fundamentalists. They believed in an inerrant Book. But they had *re-interpreted* the words to suit their own life-style. **P. 167**

As we move on through the New Testament we find again and again a similar resistance to newtruth, or, rather, to old truths re-discovered. 'O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!' Notice that the Lord did not blame them for failing to understand dark and difficult passages. He did blame them for failing to believe prophecies like (presumably) [Isaiah 53](#), where the sufferings of Christ are clearly foretold. Once again, Bible-believers were blind to Bible truth because of the current philosophy—in this case, expectation of a conquering Messiah.

We can follow the same theme through Church History. As has often been pointed out, the Pope believed 95% of what Martin Luther believed, including the plenary inspiration and authority of the Bible, and 'the just shall live by faith'. But the schoolmen had *re-interpreted* Paul's words to fit in with the current medieval philosophy and ecclesiastical system. It was 'all a matter of interpretation'. So it was in the days of John Wesley. Anglican prelates disapproved of his open-air preaching, in spite of obvious precedents in the Acts of the Apostles. Baptist elders tried to discourage Carey: 'God can take care of the heathen without your help, Master William!'—in spite of [Mark 16:15](#). They *re-interpreted* Christ's command to suit the laissez-faire philosophy of 18th century England. When George Müller and Hudson Taylor affirmed that it was possible for Christian work to be supported 'by prayer alone to God alone', Christian businessmen laughed them to scorn: 'Thinks he can live on thin air!' The promises had always been right there in [Matthew 6](#), but 'little faith' had *re-interpreted* them as being contrary to experience.

So we see that pioneers of spiritual truth are often ridiculed in their own generation. Uncomfortable doctrines are jettisoned to prevent their rocking the boat. Outward profession of conformity to Scripture is retained even when practice and teaching differ widely from its pattern. And not infrequently there is heavy reliance on *tradition*: 'Old So-

and-So was a great man of God and he believed this (or acted thus), so it must be OK for us too!' We are reminded of Kipling's brilliant satire—*The Disciple*:

He that hath a gospel  
For all earth to own—  
Though he etch it on the steel,  
Or carve it on the stone—  
Not to be misdoubted  
Through the after-days—  
It is his Disciple  
Shall read it many ways. p. 168

Yes, the Fourth Commandment was indeed carved on stone; but 20th century disciples have read *it many ways*.

## ORIGINS OF THE NON-LITERAL INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1-11

Lord Macaulay writes of John Milton: 'His attacks were directed against those deeply-seated errors on which almost all abuses are founded: the servile worship of eminent men and the irrational dread of innovation'.

The author of *Guideposts* leans heavily on eminent men: Augustine of Hippo, J. I. Packer, and Francis Schaeffer. Let us first study his remarks about Augustine: '... the ancient theologian Augustine argued that the biblical author structured the passage [Genesis One] as a literary device ...' The picture here presented to the unwary layman is of a learned Father sitting down to write his Commentary on Genesis just as Calvin and Luther did twelve centuries later, and 'arguing' that his own interpretation is correct. This picture is wholly imaginary. In his *Confessions* Books XI, XII and XIII, where Augustine deals with Genesis One, he is not arguing with anyone. Rather, he is *meditating*, in fact the whole passage is an extended prayer to God. In no sense is he setting out his own view as opposed to someone else's. Nor does the word 'structure' or the phrase 'literary device' appear. What he does is *allegorize* the whole chapter, discovering esoteric meanings that (perhaps) no one else ever thought of. Consider the following equations:

The firmament is allegorized into the Bible

waters above the firmament	=	angels
clouds	=	preachers
sea	=	unbelievers
dry land	=	believers
bringing forth fruit	=	works of mercy
stars	=	saints (in various grades of light!)

sacraments = fishes

miracles = whales

Luther comments: 'Augustine resorts to extraordinary trifling in his treatment of the six days', and some of us may be inclined to agree. Also, Augustine knew hardly a word of Hebrew and was no Greek scholar. As anchor-man in the non-literal team, he is hopelessly light-weight.

Dr. J. I. Packer is a fine theologian but his theological outlook has been strongly influenced by the British Inter-Varsity Fellowship, who have been theistic evolutionists for upwards of fifty years. Moreover he [p. 169](#) is a great admirer of Benjamin Warfield, who in turn relied on W. H. Green of Princeton for his non-literal interpretation of [Genesis 5 & 11](#). Most frequently quoted is Warfield's statement: 'The question of the antiquity of man has of itself no theological significance ... the Bible does not assign a brief span to human history'. This saying has practically become an evangelical *tradition* over the past hundred years. But is it true? What Green and Warfield seem to have overlooked is that the *veracity of God* is a matter of profound theological significance.

Theologically speaking it is a matter of entire indifference whether Christ rose from the dead on the third day or the 33rd or after three years. Even if it were three years, not one word of Paul's letter to the Romans would have to be changed. But God chose to do it on the third (literal) day, and every reference in the Gospels to Christ's resurrection includes the phrase 'after three days' or 'on the third day', or carefully specifies that only one day, the sabbath, intervened between His death and rising again. Why? Because God knows that we require every possible assurance and re-assurance to faith. And *details* of time and place are what make a story interesting and memorable. Not otherwise is it with the creation history and genealogies. Theologically it may be a matter of no significance whether Adam was created 6000 years ago or six million, whether the universe was made in six days or sixty billion years, but the veracity of God cannot be so easily dismissed—and by all the laws of language it is certain that Genesis tells of a six-day creation some 6000 years ago. There is as little reason to doubt the six days of Genesis as to doubt the Three Days of the Gospels. We shall now call witnesses to show that this has been the view of the greatest scholars, ancient and modern, for 1900 years.

## SUPPORTERS OF THE LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Flavius Josephus, a Jew of the 1st century AD, was reckoned by Scaliger, the great Reformation scholar, to be a better historian than all the Greek and Roman writers put together. He certainly had unequalled opportunities of investigating and understanding the culture and traditions of his own people. How does he handle the early chapters of Genesis?

(1) 'Moses says that in *just* six days the world and all that is therein was made ... Moreover Moses, *after* the seventh day was over, begins to talk philosophically ...'. In other words, Josephus is saying that Chapter 2 may be a bit mysterious, but in Chapter One there is no hint of any mystery at all. He obviously takes the days as literal. [p. 170](#)

(2) 'The sacred books contain the history of 5000 years ...'.

This is conclusive evidence that the Jews of Josephus' day *added up* the figures in [Genesis 5 & 11](#) to make a chronology. To make assurance doubly sure, he later states: '...

this flood began 2656 years from the first man, Adam.’ (Both computations are based on the LXX text).

What C. S. Lewis has so trenchantly written about critics of the New Testament, surely applies no less to re-interpreters of the Old:

‘The idea that any man or writer should be opaque to those who lived in the same culture, spoke the same language, shared the same habitual imagery and unconscious assumptions, and yet be transparent to those who have none of these advantages, is in my opinion preposterous. There is an *a priori* improbability in it which almost no argument and no evidence could counterbalance’. In other words, it seems unlikely that English-speaking Americans in the 20th century will understand Moses better than a Hebrew-and-Greek-speaking Jew of the 1st century AD.

St. Ambrose (d.397 AD) was no more infallible than any of the Church Fathers, but his treatment of Genesis One is grammatical and objective:

‘In notable fashion has Scripture spoken of “one day”, not “the first day” ... Scripture established a law that 24 hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of “day” only, as if one were to say that the length of one day is 24 hours in extent’.

Nobody, I think, disputes that the Reformers accepted Genesis as literal truth, but two brief quotations may be useful. Calvin: ‘God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men’. Luther: ‘We know from Moses that the world was not in existence before 6000 years ago’.

## MODERN SCHOLARS

James Barr, Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in Oxford University, ridicules the non-literal interpretation espoused by the Inter-Varsity Press: ‘... the biblical material is twisted to fit the various theories that can bring it into accord with science. In fact *the only natural exegesis* [of Genesis One] *is a literal one*, in the sense that this is what the author meant ... he was deeply interested in chronology and calendar’ (our emphasis).

Samuel R. Driver, Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University, published his commentary on Genesis in 1904 and it is still a standard work of reference. ‘There is little doubt that the writer meant “days” in the literal sense, and that Pearson was right when he inferred from the [p. 171](#) chapter that the world was represented as created “6000 or, at farthest, 7000 years” from the 17th century AD’. The same interpretation is maintained by Keil and Delitzsch, Gerhard von Rad, and (so far as I am aware) by every major commentary on Genesis. In fact we have never heard of any Professor of Hebrew in any of the world’s great Universities who believes that the original writer did not intend his words to be taken literally. Let the Interpreter’s Commentary speak for them all:

‘There can be no question but that by DAY the author meant just what we mean—the time required for one revolution of the earth on its axis. Had he meant aeon he would certainly, in view of his fondness for great numbers, have stated the number of millenniums each period embraced’.

Finally, Dr. John C. Whitcomb has pointed out that a close parallel to Genesis One can be found in [Numbers 7](#). No expositor would dare to affirm that the extended and metaphorical use of ‘day’ in [7:84](#) negates the literal 24-hour days of vv.[12](#), [18](#), [24](#) etc. No more should any expositor try to maintain that the extended and metaphorical use of ‘day’ in [Gen. 2:4](#) negates the literal days of chapter One.

## FRANCIS SCHAEFFER

The last of CT's 'eminent men' is Dr. Francis Schaeffer. We too admire his versatility and outstanding achievements, but as a Hebrew scholar he cannot be compared with Barr and Driver, let alone with Calvin and Luther. Let us glance briefly at his objection to the literal interpretation: '... the Bible never uses these early genealogies as a chronology. It never adds up these numbers for dating'.

This seems to us a perfect example of begging the question, because the figures *are* a chronology. Otherwise no conceivable purpose can be adduced for noting the age of each father at the birth of his son (especially in ch.11, where the 'begetting ages' are quite normal by modern standards, mostly in the 30s). Why should Moses do for us what we can do for ourselves?' Similarly Moses does not in ch.11 add up the total life-span of each patriarch, as he did in ch.5. Does this mean that (e.g.) Shelah did *not* live to be 433? Obviously he did; but Moses does not waste words telling us the obvious, because the principle of addition had already been established in ch.5. Also, Moses does not tell us the age of Jacob at the birth of Joseph, but he very neatly works it into the story (41:46; 45:6; [47:9](#)) so that by simple addition and subtraction we find it to be 91. *We are expected to do the sum for ourselves*. There is no reason to doubt that Moses was working on [p. 172](#) exactly the same principle when he left the totals un-added in chs.5 & 11. So we conclude that Dr. Schaeffer's objection is invalid. In the Bible long dates ([Exodus 12](#), [1 Kings 6](#)) are given *only* when there is no other way of computing the total.

### ADAM 100,000 BC?

There are, by the way, a number of other problems attached to the 100,000 year theory:

- (1) God condemned Adam to eat BREAD, and archaeology tells us that wheat appeared only 6000–7000 years ago.
- (2) Cain built a CITY, and archaeology knows nothing of city-building before 7000 BC.
- (3) What was God doing for 100,000 years while the human race murdered and plundered and raped and tortured and wallowed in every kind of abominable bestiality? It is hard enough to 'justify the ways of God to man' on the assumption that He waited 4000 years before sending a Saviour. To explain a delay of 100,000 years is, we opine, absolutely impossible.

### THE LENGTH OF THE SIXTH DAY

Isn't it interesting that no Bible expositor before Darwin had any problems with the sixth day? But now we are told: 'Clearly the author is indicating that the sixth day extended over quite a period of time'. We beg to differ. How long does it take God to plant a garden? Not longer, I think, than the time it has taken you to read the question. How long did God need to create Adam? Five seconds, perhaps? And how many pairs of animals did Adam have to see before he felt his own need of a mate? Ten—twenty—fifty? Surely not more than fifty—and one can see fifty pairs of animals in a couple of hours at any fair-sized zoo. Naming them would be no problem for a man with a perfect mind and a Godgiven language. But what about Eve? Surely that operation took a long time? One pictures—subconsciously—angel nurses scrubbing Adam's chest, white-robed cherubim administering anaesthetic, and the long wait that often precedes surgery in a modern hospital. All pure fantasy! Almighty God, we suggest, did not need ten minutes to remove Adam's rib and build it into a woman. As for Adam's 'Now—at last!'—the expression of joy and surprise is perfectly natural and reasonable when we ponder the fact that he had never seen another human, let alone a beautiful woman (Luther was so sure of the Sixth

Day being completed by the first 'Friday' that he confidently assigns the Fall to the first Sabbath). No—the 'long-sixth-day' objection is another 'deeply-seated error', a desperately weak argument cobbled together to [P. 173](#) escape the inescapable confrontation of [Exodus 20](#) and [31](#). 'Ye do err, not knowing ... the power of God'.

## THE FLOOD IGNORED

It is puzzling to find in *Guideposts* no reference to Noah's flood—puzzling because this is *the* real point at issue. If the fossils were caused by one colossal deluge, then there never was a need for the Gap Theory or any of the other intellectual contortions devised by evangelical concordists over the last 120 years. (We suggest the time has come for CT to review Dillow's impressive book *The Waters Above*, Moody 1981/2, which reinforces with massive new evidence Whitcomb & Morris' *Genesis Flood*). There may be problems connected with this Bible history (e.g. How did the marsupials reach Australia?) but these are as nothing compared with the problem of explaining away the physical evidence *for* a universal flood.

It is also fair to say that if [Genesis 6–9](#) had been written in any book other than the Bible, no one would have doubted that the writer meant to convey the idea of a world-wide deluge. For example, compare the Latin poet Ovid's account of the same event: 'Wherever old Ocean roars around the earth, I must destroy the race of men ...' says Jupiter. 'He preferred to destroy the human race beneath the waves ... and now the sea and land have no distinction. All is sea, and a sea without a shore ... Here (on Mount Parnassus, 8000 feet) Deucalion and his wife had come to land—for the sea had covered all things else (Deucalion addresses his wife) 'O only woman left on earth ... we two are the only survivors, the sea holds all the rest'. Any scholar who dared to suggest that Ovid did *not* intend to depict a universal flood, would be laughed out of court. Now—the language of [Genesis 6–9](#) is at least as unambiguous and comprehensive as Ovid's, but evangelical concordists have succeeded in throwing an aura of mystery round the Bible story so that 'no one can be quite sure what it means'. Alas for Christendom!

It is his Disciple  
Who shall tell us how  
Much the Master would have scrapped  
Had he lived till now ...  
Amplify distinctions,  
Rationalize the claim;  
Preaching that the Master  
Would have done the same.

On the contrary, we believe that GOD is the greatest communicator of [p. 174](#) all time. When He planned his revelation to mankind, He had at his disposal all the words of all the languages of every tribe and nation. How could He have failed to communicate what He really meant—when a pagan poet succeeded?

## TOO COMPLICATED

Our final objection to the Non-Literal Theory (NLT) is that it is far too complicated. Every teacher knows that you begin with the simple and move on the complex. This principle can be clearly seen in the Bible, too. Prose in Samuel and Kings leads on to poetry in the Psalms, philosophy in Ecclesiastes, prophecy in Isaiah and finally difficult passages in Ezekiel and Daniel. But the non-literal school would have us believe that right at the

beginning of his revelation God has placed a conundrum as hard to solve as any in the whole Bible. Anyone who has tried to teach the elements of Christianity to primitive or illiterate people will recognize the utter impossibility of explaining to them why God's first words should be 'a *subtle, highly sophisticated modification of an ancient Mesopotamian literary device*' (R. Youngblood) rather than plain statements of fact, easily intelligible in every language to all peoples—as the pioneer missionaries believed. The Literary Framework Hypothesis is a house of cards carefully constructed by academics in the airless atmosphere and artificial light of a theological library. We need to open the windows and allow a good strong blast of common sense to blow it down. And what about children? Of all books in the Bible, Genesis is pre-eminently the children's book. Who can doubt but that these fascinating stories were designed by God to allure the sweet innocence of childhood and lead us gently to faith in Christ? ('from a *babe* thou hast known the Holy Scriptures', writes Paul to Timothy). But now, inevitably, questions will be asked:

'Dad, did God *really* make everything in six days?'

'Mom, did the ark *really* hold every kind of animal?'

—and parents who follow the NLT with one accord begin to make excuse:

'Well, no, not really, darling. You see, the scientists say ...'

In view of Christ's solemn words about causing little ones to stumble, I would not like to stand in the shoes of anyone who teaches a child that in the A-B-C book of religion, God does not mean what He says.

## AN APPEAL

Finally, a personal appeal to 'progressive creationists'. 'If you can't **P. 175** beat 'em, join 'em', is good advice. The past twenty years have seen a mighty movement 'Back to the Bible', following the exposure of mega-evolution as a mega-lie, and the discovery of many new facts supporting creationism. Would it not be wise to admit, now, that the pioneers (Whitcomb and Morris) were right after all? Non-literalist commentaries on Genesis are the laughing-stock of the world, and no amount of special pleading or re-interpretation is ever going to persuade ordinary people that Moses did not teach a literal six-day creation, a Young Earth, and a universal flood. 'Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould', as did the medieval church, as did William Carey's obstructors, and Hudson Taylor's. Martin Luther's challenge of 500 years ago is right up to date: 'If I profess with the loudest voice every Bible doctrine *except that one truth* which Satan is attacking today, I am no soldier of Jesus Christ'. You don't have to be a reader of the *Smithsonian* to know which Bible truths are under special attack today. Noah's flood is a 'fairy tale'; Archbishop Ussher is a figure of fun; and six-day creation is a 'prescientific myth'. That is why God is calling for *real* disciples who will *not* 'amplify distinctions' or 'rationalize the claim', but will stand up and tell the world that He means just what He says in [Genesis 1-11](#). The scientific establishment will never take seriously the Christian doctrine of Last Things until they see that Christians take seriously the Bible doctrine of First Things. Unbelievers will recognize their dreams of the future as wholly delusive only when they are shown that their picture of the past is completely chimerical.

'When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled. And the men of Israel pursued ...' As Norman Macbeth recently said, it is a time for funerals—of evolutionary hypotheses. The top Philistines know well that their champion (Darwin) is dead. Isn't it time for all true-hearted soldiers to join in the pursuit?

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# Genesis and Evolution

Nigel M. de S. Cameron

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## THE BACKGROUND

A recent issue of *The Times* newspaper of London carried lengthy letters from two well-known evangelical scientists on the question of evolution. One wrote disparagingly of the creationists as believing in 'Paley's divine Watchmaker who retired above the bright blue sky after a week of frenzied activity in 4004 BC'. The other, who happens to be the President of the Biblical Creation Society,<sup>1</sup> suggested that the creationist view had much to commend it, particularly in the light of recent doubt expressed by the scientific community in its traditional belief in evolution.<sup>2</sup>

What are we to make of this debate? In the USA for many years now creationism has been gathering in strength, and recently mounting disquiet in scientific circles the world over as to the adequacy of neo-Darwinism in purely scientific terms has lent new credence to traditional creationist positions. For example, Stephen Jan Gould of Harvard has developed a theory of 'punctuated equilibrium' which, although thoroughly evolutionary (and Gould is a vigorous opponent of creationism), accepts that the traditional reading of the fossil record as indicating gradual evolutionary change may no longer be sustained. Gould's answer, which has gained increasing acceptance among his professional colleagues, is to suggest an evolution that proceeds by relatively sudden 'jumps' rather than the slow processes of (neo-) Darwinian orthodoxy. Creationists, of course, have maintained all along that the fossil record does not support gradual change.<sup>3</sup> In Britain considerable controversy has been generated within the scientific community by an exhibition mounted at the British Museum (Natural History) in London which suggested that evolution was only *one way* of explaining the biological order. It has been motivated by 'cladism', which is a new and complex way of categorizing organisms, and whose supporters are prepared to be agnostic about the origins of living things since they do not believe the theory of evolution to be any help to them in their work of taxonomy. A

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<sup>1</sup> The Biblical Creation Society is one of the British groupings of Christians opposed to the theology of evolution. It publishes *Biblical Creation* (a journal for students and others) and *Rainbow* (a popular broadsheet), as well as monograph series and various pamphlets. Information may be obtained from the Secretary, 51 Cloan Crescent, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow G64 2HN Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, London, 16 December 1981. The correspondents cited are, respectively, Prof. R. J. Berry and Prof. E. H. Andrews.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Duane Gish, *Evolution: the Fossils say No!* (San Diego, 1974).