Ca' Foscari
University
of Venice

Master's Degree Programme
in European, American, and Postcolonial Languages and Literatures

Final Thesis

Beyond the Bible: Creationism in U.S. Evangelical Media and Institutions

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Academic Year
2023 / 2024

ABSTRACT

This research project focuses on American Evangelicalism and specifically on the theory of creationism, its development, and its depiction in contemporary Evangelical media and institutions such as television, children's literature, and museums. The methodology employed is the discourse analysis of Evangelical resources for families, particularly school-age children, and preadolescents, often in contrast to the scientific theory of evolution. These materials are designed to teach children about God's intelligent design and educate them according to their family's religious beliefs. Historically contextualized, these sources also show, on one side, the Evangelicals' attempt at evolving and adapting to a changing country, but, on the other, their vocal effort to legitimize the priority of religion in American society fully.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyzes U.S. evangelical media and institutions in the context of creationism to demonstrate their various and complex facets and the common intention to break away from the "secular" and evolutionist tradition that has characterized Protestant American society for over a century, which aims not only to inform and educate the followers of this religious movement but also to produce scientific literature to support and motivate evangelicals' zeal for transforming their religious belief into real science.

The discussion aims to introduce the media and institutions created for this purpose, such as documentaries, children's books, and museums, to a broader audience of experts and non-experts approaching this topic for the first time. Numerous academic and personal factors have determined the choice of these three cultural products. Very often, this type of product, reserved for families and especially for children, is placed on the back burner compared to academic and scientific texts, as they are considered more important to understand the development of alternative currents of thought and science, as in this case. However, to best understand why an ideology succeeds, even if only in a small group such as evangelicals, products aimed at children and families are necessary as well, mainly because these families often prefer homeschooling to maintain their identity and not contaminate their beliefs with outside elements such as evolutionism and other scientific theories that may contradict the Bible.

The second reason for choosing this theme is a personal interest in sectarian religious groups and cultural products aimed at children. In other cultural productions, indeed, it is challenging to find simple yet detailed explanations of the cornerstones of a movement, be it political or religious. As explained in this study, creationist propaganda is not as veiled as in other cultural products, but it is aggressive and aims to condition thinking, especially in the long term. In products for adults or academic purposes, not only is a more appropriate language chosen, but an attempt is also made to show a calmer and more innocent side to convince of the harmlessness of a certain current of thought, especially when, as in this case, it contrasts strongly with the idea of science that has been drawn and confirmed over the centuries both in popular culture and the academic community. This defiance, aimed at catching up with – if not replacing – evolutionism in the hearts and minds of the average American, is not a new phenomenon but has its origins almost contemporaneous with Darwin, as explained in this work.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents the history of the American evangelical movement from its origins to the present day to provide a solid foundation for those unfamiliar with the topic. Similarly, the second chapter looks at the history of creationist thought, following the timeline outlined in the first chapter to further deepen the reader's understanding.

The following three chapters each focus on a different cultural product contextualized and analyzed in detail. Chapter three is dedicated to television, a medium in which this movement is one of its pioneers, and the examination of three topics: dinosaurs, the Scopes Trial, and the fight against Darwinism. The products examined belong to the program "Origins," which is produced and distributed by the private broadcaster Cornerstone Television Network and available for free on YouTube. Chapter four, on the other hand, aims to analyze children's literature, namely three products published between the end of last century and 2021. These texts, two of which are time-traveling series, are the most recent products, offering their young readers not only food for thought but also lessons in creationism to prepare them to deal with a scientific and evolutionary world in which faith has long since lost its supremacy – or so they seem to suggest. Finally, the fourth chapter is dedicated to a "new" institution: the creationist museum. Creationist museums are also a product of aggressive propaganda, bombarding their guests with brand-new technological devices and facilities, paid with taxpayers' money, whether creationist or evolutionist, aimed at spreading creationist theory in all its facts. However, as we shall see, these sites do not provide an educational space, nor do they aim to prove the validity of creationism in scientific terms, but to confirm biblical evidence and to criticize evolutionism.

CHAPTER 1
AMERICAN EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

If initially the term "evangelical" referred to the Gospel and Lutheran Reformation, over the centuries, American evangelicalism has developed distinct traits that distinguish it from mainstream Protestantism.

American evangelicalism began in the 16th century, when the Anglican preacher George Whitefield (1714-1770) visited American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, sparking a wave of revival, the Great Awakening. This movement, despite specific ethnic and theological differences, brought together various revivalist movements around the shared belief in the importance of personal conversion and heartfelt, experiential faith (Balmer 244).

The evangelicals of the 18th century, often called "New Lights," played a crucial role in shaping American culture: many supported the Patriots in the Revolution, and religious leaders allied with Enlightenment deists to advocate the separation of church and state. In this sense, the Second Great Awakening (1790s-1830s) contributed uniquely to antebellum America, leading to a new wave of revivalism across the new nation (245). For instance, in New England, the revival inspired social reform movements like temperance, the women's seminary movement, prison reform, and abolitionism, but, after the Civil War, theological disagreements began to fracture the evangelical movements, especially Northern denominations.

Moreover, new scientific theories, particularly Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), and German higher criticism challenged traditional Bible interpretation, deepening divisions with the Protestant community, which divided into two factions: conservatives and liberals (or modernists). If, on the one hand, conservatives defended the Bible's divine inspiration and inerrancy, on the other, liberals adopted a more flexible interpretation that embraced new scientific discoveries and social reforms, such as the Social Gospel (246). As a result, by the 1910s and 1920s, the division between conservatives and liberals deepened even more, leading to the publication of *The Fundamentals*, a series of pamphlets outlining the core beliefs of evangelicals, including biblical inerrancy, the virgin birth, Christ's atonement and resurrection, the reality of miracles, and dispensational premillennialism – these beliefs, known as the "five points of fundamentalism," would be at the center of doctrinal disputes in the 1920s. Although fundamentalists often lost these battles, leading many to form independent churches, they somehow persisted.

However, their fate changed after the Scopes Trial (1925), when they were ridiculed in the media, reinforcing the stereotype of fundamentalists' intolerance, and were forced to retreat from public life, but their efforts did not end. During this period, indeed, fundamentalists built a thriving subculture of churches, schools, seminaries, Bible camps, and publishing houses. This laid the foundation for their resurgence during the Long Sixties and the 1980s, when they gained influence in American politics and social life (247).

Moreover, Graham masterfully succeeded in challenging the Protestant institutions and effectively integrating himself within them, bringing a wave of innovation that, thanks especially to his charisma and sermons, gave rise to a new movement: neo-evangelicalism, which is none other than evangelicalism as we know it today.

1.1 Early Beginnings: The 19th century

In the United States, the term "evangelical" was initially a synonym for Protestantism and took on its modern meaning only during the awakenings of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that occurred in two phases: the First Great Awakening (1730s-1750s) and the Second Great Awakening (1790s-1850s) (Hankins 3). While the First Great Awakening was influenced by the English revivals between the last decade of the 17th century and the first half of the 18th century, influencing the period leading up to the American Revolution thanks to figures such as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and George Whitefield (Melton 9), the Second Great Awakening, on the other hand, began shortly after the War of Independence (1775-1783) and influenced and shaped the American religious environment intermittently until the 1850s. The projects, speeches, and activities of preachers like Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) had a double outcome: establishing evangelical Protestantism as the leading national religion in a rising country and fostering a Protestant consensus that shaped the cultural and social priorities even for the following century (Fitzgerald 49).

Both revivals reshaped the concept of religion and faith. They aimed, in particular, at a more personalized way of being Christian, introducing a new definition of conversion – a moral conversion – as a sudden and often overwhelming experience of God's grace. Moreover, the Second Great Awakening advocated for numerous social reforms more than its predecessor. Awakened evangelicals first built institutions for children and the weak, revised the penal system, and addressed the needs of immigrants and the poor through mission churches and charitable efforts. Then, they focused on self-control and moderation as moral and social values, branching into dietary and health reforms such as the Temperance movement (45-47).

1.1.1 The First Great Awakening (1730s-1750s)

The Church of England initiated the first changes in the modern religious environment during the last decades of the 17th century. Characterized by the political and social turmoil of the British Empire, these years led people to view religion in a more positive light. Early initiatives aimed to expand the Church into American regions with little or no presence: in 1692, King's Chapel was built in Boston, and the following year, New York enacted an Establishment Act despite the lack of demand for Anglican services. Finally, in 1694, the small Anglican congregation in Philadelphia founded Christ Church, and the central government appointed Thomas Bray (c. 1656-1730) as a commissary for Maryland in 1696, which impacted and changed their position in the New World. Bray, indeed, concentrated on organizing the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK, 1608), whose aim was to send libraries to American colonies, and on the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG, 1701), recruiting priests and sending them over to American churches, reaching over 300 men throughout the next 75 years. Although the SPG helped the Church of England compete with other churches, its progress was largely undone by the growth of Presbyterians, Baptists, and the later influx of Pietism.

Moreover, in the 17th century, Presbyterians began emigrating to American colonies but were often absorbed by other religious denominations, such as the Congregationalists, especially in New England (Melton 9). The Congregationalists were direct descendants of the New England Puritans, who formed close-knit, covenantal communities in which the Church and the State worked together to build a "Holy Commonwealth." Similarly to Calvinists, they believed in the existence of an unreachable and unknowable God, who controls all events, in the corrupted nature of humanity since Adam's fall into sin, and in the everlasting and constant battle against Satan. Furthermore, God punished humankind, condemning them to eternal damnation, saving only a selected few who devoted themselves to piety and introspection because of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Finally, they believed that by keeping their covenant with God and submitting to the will of the community, they could build a new Jerusalem, a "city on a hill" (Fitzgerald 15).

However, in the 18th century, the American Puritans encountered social and theological difficulties due to the influx of other Christian denominations and non-believers and the growing sentiment of individualism fostered by merchants' and landowners' increasing wealth. Not only did economic disagreements between the colonists and the aristocracy in charge and

political groups develop, but also when Enlightenment ideas about free will and reason spread among the educated, Calvinist doctrines, such as predestination and human depravity, were questioned. Congregationalist clergy preached adherence to the God-given order, but many people struggled to conform to the old ways, feeling guilty for their apostasy.

The revivals in New England began in 1734, within the center of orthodox Calvinism: Jonathan Edwards' church in Northampton, Massachusetts. Jonathan Edwards, regarded as one of the founders of American thought, was a Yale graduate and the grandson of a Congregationalist preacher. His personal encounter with the divine significantly impacted his preaching style, leading him to revive Calvinist theology and defend it against Enlightenment humanism by employing its reasonings. Eventually, Edwards succeeded his grandfather as pastor in Northampton in 1729 (16).

Concerned about the declining moral standards among the parishioners, especially the younger members, Edwards called meetings and prayer sessions to strengthen the community. Five years later, during a series of sermons on justification by faith, a religious fervor erupted in his congregation: parishioners felt hope and joy, leading to 300 conversions within six months, increasing the church's membership to nearly the entire adult population of the town. The revival spread throughout the town of Connecticut River and beyond New England. Edwards attributed this revival to a sudden and surprising descent of the Holy Spirit.

Revivals had occurred before among the Puritans and their descendants; however, they typically called for covenant renewal and obedience to the God-given order of offices and magistrates. On the other hand, Edwards preached that every individual could have a direct relationship with Christ, who would have saved everyone who received his grace, not only those seemingly worthy. As a result, in contrast to earlier local and short-lived revivals, this revival continued and spread beyond the Congregationalists to the Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed congregations, especially thanks to George Whitefield, who, in 1739, further promoted revivals throughout the colonies (17-18).

George Whitefield was an itinerant preacher. An Oxford graduate and Anglican clergyman, Whitefield was known for his powerful voice, dramatic style, and ability to simplify church teachings for a broad audience, aided by his acting training (Hankins 7). Whitefield's evangelic efforts extended both in Great Britain and America. After being ordinated a deacon in 1736 and a priest in 1739, he felt called to proselytize in the American colonies. Whitefield's preaching tours, widely reported in the newspapers, drew large crowds and became American history's first significant trans-colonial event (10). In 1738, Whitefield set out on his first of seven journeys to the American colonies. His charismatic preaching style and extensive media

coverage made him the first intercolonial celebrity and a catalyst for local revivals that would make evangelicalism a widespread movement (Fitzgerald 18).

However, not only did the revivals increase church attendance, but they also caused controversy. Radical preachers, indeed, promoted excessive emotional reactions and questioned the authority of the Church, inciting a backlash from both moderate revivalists and conservative clergy. As a result, a movement against revivalism emerged, challenging the authenticity of the conversions and denouncing their extreme emotional outbursts. The difference was shown in a famous discussion between Jonathan Edwards and Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), a Congregational minister: while Edwards defended the necessity of an intensely felt religious experience, Chauncy downplayed it. By 1743, revival debates, often characterized by harsh language, divided the Congregationalist clergy and undermined lay confidence in church leadership. Ironically, the revivalists weakened the authority of the clergy by emphasizing traditional Calvinist doctrines, while their opponents defended the status quo with Enlightenment values such as reason and education. These conflicts gave the radical revivalists a boost (21).

After Whitefield visited Boston, some groups in Connecticut and New England formed their prayer groups and churches, attempting to return to the purity of the early church. These Separatists often clashed with civil authorities and orthodox clergy, insisting on religious freedom and tax exemption. Moreover, many were threatened with fines and imprisonment for their insubordination and their essays against the clergy and authorities. After the Revolution, they led the movement for the separation of the Church and the State, and many moved to the Middle Colonies and the South (22-23).

The revivals of the First Great Awakening continued to the 1760s and significantly influenced American evangelicalism. By the time of the American Revolution, evangelicalism had spread throughout the country, causing divisions within the major Protestant denominations, inspiring the Baptist movement, and challenging the authority of established churches (Hankins 11).

1.1.2 The Second Great Awakening (1790s-1850s)

After the American Revolution, the intense religious revivals that characterized the earlier part of the century gradually diminished but never completely ended. This decline was due to several factors, such as the effects of the war on the local population and the emergence (and spread) of new religious ideologies. Moreover, after the war, settlers moved westward, beyond

the Appalachians, into Kentucky and Tennessee (Hankins 11), and, later, into the South and Midwest. If, at the time of the first official U.S. government census (1790), almost the entire population (94%) lived in the original colonies, indeed, by 1850, the majority lived outside the colonies, in the territories to the west. Not only that, but the population grew at an astounding rate, increasing from two and a half million to twenty million in the seventy years following the Revolution. In this burgeoning country, religion also had to evolve (Fitzgerald 25).

Initially, the revivalist preachers followed the settlers' westward movement to minister to the non-Christians. However, to do this, they had to simplify their faith by removing the most rigid aspects of Calvinism, adapting it to the reality of the new converts, and finding new ways to preach and proselytize. One of the most successful initiatives was "the camp," a multi-day gathering usually held by various denominations (26). These evangelical gatherings invited people from great distances for open-air worship services that aimed to inspire the heartfelt conversion and religious enthusiasm characteristic of the previous century. The first of such events was hosted by James McGready (1763-1817), a Presbyterian minister, at Gasper River in July 1800, at which an estimated forty-five people were converted. By the end of the summer, the revivals had spread throughout Kentucky and Tennessee, setting the stage for the more famous Cane Ridge revival the following year and the formal starting date of the Second Great Awakening (Hankins 13).

Different denominations used different methods and approaches for new ways of reaching new people. The tradition that flourished the most was Methodism, which focused on frontier work. Its most famous and prolific leader was Francis Asbury (1745-1816), a British preacher who arrived in America in 1771 and later took the title of bishop. His focus was to organize camp meetings as a regular part of church activities and to assemble a small group of riders who traveled on horseback to preach to the unconverted and strengthen the faith of their scattered parishioners. Their approach combined centralized control with an egalitarian style and democratic inclusion, encouraging parishioners to participate actively in the church's activities (Fitzgerald 26-27).

Another denomination that grew as fast as the Methodist Church was the Baptist Church. Its structure preferred independent churches united in regional and national associations. The more prominent associations had missionary societies: itinerant preachers or evangelists who were independent and self-supporting preachers, usually licensed farmers, who moved to a new area and planted a church and rarely had a higher education than their parishioners (27).

The last major denomination to benefit from the revivals was the Presbyterian Church. By the beginning of the new century, it had formed two synods and seven presbyteries in the

South, and, in 1801, it had established a plan of union with the Congregationalists to evangelize New York State and the territories to the West. However, different Presbyterians had mixed reactions to evangelical meetings, resulting in the formation of two sects: the Cumberland Presbyterian Church and a Christian movement that thirty years later would have joined a group formed by Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), another dissident Presbyterian, to create a new denomination, the Disciples of Christ (27-28).

During the Second Great Awakening, innovative approaches helped develop a common evangelicalism, a simplified religious system that could adapt well to frontier communities and was steeped in Enlightenment ideas about free will and universal salvation (30). Moreover, these approaches were very effective in the South, with rapid and ever-growing conversions leading to the dominance of Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in Virginia and Texas by 1850 (32).

The most influential revivalist preacher was Charles Grandison Finney, a former lawyer who converted in 1821. Instead of committing himself to a permanent ministry, Finney traveled on horseback, preaching, and making house calls for a women's missionary society. In 1826, he moved to Oneida County, New York, where revivals in towns along the Erie Canal attracted thousands of people. By 1832, Finney was the most famous evangelist in the country. Finney's direct and dramatic preaching style was characterized by everyday language, using conventional examples rather than literary references, and his sermons, which were structured and persuasive, spoke directly to the audience, evoking a strong emotional response (35), calling out sinners and encouraging women to pray and exhort publicly. However, Finney's theology departed from traditional Calvinism: he emphasized free will and human ability over doctrines such as original sin and predestination, and he believed revivals were not miracles but the result of the effective use of appropriate means (36). Furthermore, his new measures, which included addressing social hierarchies equally and encouraging the active participation of all, met with criticism from the established clergy but eventually prevailed.

Moreover, Finney devoted himself to other causes and campaigned for democratic Christianity and social reform, such as the abolition of slavery. In New York, he joined forces with wealthy businessmen such as Arthur (1786-1865) and Lewis Tappan (1788-1873), the founders of the New York Society for the Abolition of Slavery (1833), who were firmly committed to philanthropy and social causes, including the establishment of colleges for workers and the abolition of slavery. While many evangelicals in the North regarded slavery as a sin, many preachers around 1830 were reluctant to condemn it because of the importance of the cotton trade. Nevertheless, Finney preached vehemently against slavery, defining it as a

“great national sin” and refusing communion to slaveholders (40). However, despite his involvement with the cause, Finney had reservations about the abolition movement he had inspired: he believed that slavery should be addressed in a religious context and feared that focusing solely on anti-slavery agitation could lead to civil war. He then argued that the abolition of slavery should be part of a broader religious revival to meet the needs of the nation and the slaves (42).

After an intense revival in 1836, Charles Finney and several members of the faculty at Oberlin College, where he became a professor in 1835, concluded that believers could achieve a higher level of sanctification: by trusting entirely in Christ, they would have blessed a second time from the Holy Spirit and achieve Christian perfection. This perfectionism, which had its roots in the teachings of John Wesley (1703-1791), emphasized moral responsibility over emotional sensitivity and included perfect obedience to God’s law and an unqualified commitment to love God and one’s neighbor. Moreover, despite scandalizing many Congregationalist and Presbyterian ministers, Finney’s teachings resonated with many believers. During the 1840s, it spread to various evangelical denominations and regions, including New York, the Midwest, and Europe, particularly England and Scotland (44).

The end of the Second Great Awakening was set by many historians around 1858, after a series of urban revivals that broke simultaneously in various parts of the country (Hankins 15). The revivals of the 19th century involved many different evangelical Protestant denominations in the North and advocated for numerous social reforms. First, they built institutions for children and the weak, revised the penal system, and addressed the needs of immigrants and the poor through mission churches and charitable efforts. Then, they focused on temperance and branched out into dietary and health reforms thanks to the efforts of physicians and experts like Dr. Sylvester Graham (Fitzgerald 45-47).

Revivals became mainstream American events, and many newspapers reported them positively, often highlighting the reduction in violence and crime in the most affected areas. As a result, evangelical Protestantism entered a period of dominance, a trend that would continue until the turn of the century (Hankins 15).

1.2 Fundamentalism vs. Modernism: From the Civil War to the Scopes Trial (1925)

During the Second Great Awakening, many preachers spoke out against slavery, which eventually led to the separation between Northern and Southern denominations, with Methodists and Baptists formally dividing in 1845 as the most famous example. The Southern

churches, in particular, defended slavery as a necessary institution and justified it with biblical and economic arguments (Fitzgerald 51). These divisions eventually impacted broader social reforms: Southern evangelicals became suspicious of all reforms, seeing them as a threat to the institution of slavery and, more in general, their socio-cultural and economic *status quo*. This led to the doctrine of "church spirituality," which advocated ecclesiastical separation from social and political affairs (52) and persisted in the South for 150 years.

Regional differences also extended to their definitions of Christian life. While evangelicals in the North sought social reform inspired by Calvinist theology and belief in building the Kingdom of God on earth (53), evangelicals in the South focused on conversion and personal holiness, creating strong social cohesion in a homogeneous, rural, and largely isolated society (54). Additionally, evangelicalism in the North faced a more diverse and dynamic social landscape, thanks mainly to heavy immigration, religious pluralism, and engagement with contemporary science and critical biblical scholarship (55). Moreover, this division was deepened by a new approach to theology that emerged in Europe and came to America in the second half of the 19th century: modernist theology. Popularized by evangelical ministers such as Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) and Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), liberal theology dominated all branches of knowledge, promoting the adaptation of Christian beliefs to better align with contemporary thought, God's immanence, and the conviction that civilization was progressing towards the kingdom of God (Hankins 19). In the first quarter of the new century, liberal theology influenced and changed denominations, leading to the decline of conservative beliefs such as biblical infallibility and the immutability of church doctrines (95).

On the other hand, evangelicals who refused modern theological approaches prepared their defense of traditional beliefs and faith through Bible conferences and institutes. One of the most important was undoubtedly the Northfield Bible Conference, founded in 1880 by Dwight L. Moody (1837 – 1899), the most famous evangelical preacher of the time. The Northfield Bible Conference was a pioneer and, later, became the model for Bible conferences that defended evangelicalism against modernism by emphasizing traditional Christian foundations. Similarly, the Moody Bible Institute became a center for training evangelicals and defending the faith against modernism. Both these institutions developed and employed the so-called "five points of fundamentalism" to defend Christianity from the modernist reinterpretation of the Scriptures and, more generally, of the doctrine. However, it was only between 1910 and 1915 that the fundamentalist branch took shape, especially thanks to the publication of *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, a twelve-volume series of essays

authored by sixty-four British and American authors aimed to affirm Christian doctrines with three of them even addressed Darwinism (Hankins 27-30).

The controversy between modernists and fundamentalists officially began in the years between the First World War. The conflict intensified this controversy, transforming it from a theological dispute into a broader cultural struggle, as Americans blamed Germany for the war and also saw its culture as a kind of enemy: fundamentalists, in particular, associated German militarism with the philosophy of Nietzsche and German intellectualism, which, along with evolutionary thought, was the current of thought that influenced theological liberalism and higher scriptural criticism, and they began to believe that if German theology were not defeated in American religious institutions, the country would face a downfall similar to that of Germany (31).

1.2.1 Theological Modernism: New Theology

In the second phase of the American Industrial Revolution, between 1860 and 1920, small businesses succumbed to large corporations that dominated the major industries. While this brought technological innovation, increased productivity, and prosperity for many, it also caused significant disruption. However, during this time, Protestants built more churches, increasing church attendance (Fitzgerald 58-59).

In response to these changes, American Protestants diverged. Liberals aimed to understand and integrate the new realities into Christianity, seeking a middle ground between secularism and orthodoxy. Conservatives, on the other hand, alarmed by the liberal apostasy, focused on reinforcing orthodox teachings and using them to define this new reality. As we shall see, the two groups developed along separate paths but did not clash directly until the early 20th century (60).

The liberal theology of the 1880s, known as the New Theology, resulted from the influence of three primary modern intellectual movements: Romanticism, evolutionary science, and literary criticism. By the 1930s, theological modernism had evolved into what was known as theological liberalism, though the terms are often used interchangeably (Hankins 19).

European Romanticism, which prioritized feelings and intuition as sources of divine truth, became part of the modernist Protestant response to the evangelical emphasis on biblical authority and shifting the focus from fixed theological truths in Scripture to personal experience of God through emotion and intuition (Hankins 20). Romantic ideas first gained ground in America in the late 19th century, especially among popular preachers such as Phillips Brooks

(1835-1893). Brooks, influenced by Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) and other Romantic liberals such as Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887), emphasized a direct, personal experience of God over doctrinal formulations. For the modernists, the experience of God was more about natural feelings and intuition than supernatural experiences. Christianity was thus redefined as a faith centered on immanence, human goodness, and moral example, challenging the traditional evangelical emphasis on the crucifixion and resurrection (21).

The second major influence of the New Theology was evolutionary science. Between the 1870s and 1880s, many educated clergy, including younger Princeton conservatives, accepted Darwinian evolution as a legitimate science, as will be analyzed in the next paragraph.

Calvinists traditionally believed that science and religion were compatible since both reveal the truths of God. Therefore, following Asa Gray (1810-1888), a famous American botanist, they argued that God was involved in the evolutionary process and that Genesis was an ancient attempt to communicate scientific truths. However, they claimed that the theory of evolution had limitations and could not explain man's uniqueness, free will, moral sense, religious feelings, or personal identity (Fitzgerald 64).

Finally, the third major influence on theological modernism was modern literary criticism. This approach emerged in Germany in the late 18th century as German scholars analyzed biblical texts like other ancient works, employing disciplines such as philology, archeology, anthropology, and literary analysis to determine the origins, authorship, and historical context of the biblical books. This method, known as higher criticism, led to a new theological school led by religionist Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who argued that theology should focus on the human experience of the divine (63).

Before the Civil War, German theological ideas reached the United States only indirectly. Even in the 1880s, there were few American proponents of higher criticism, and it was largely unknown among the clergy. However, proponents of the New Theology, whom Bushnell influenced, viewed higher criticism as a means to better understand the Bible as a historical record of God's progressive revelation to humanity (interpreted in the context of the times). As a result, they adopted Schleiermacher's idea that following Christ was a constantly renewing challenge (64). By the late 19th century, higher criticism had gained prominence in American theological seminaries, leading to various interpretations of biblical authority. For example, modernist theologians such as William Newton Clarke (1841-1912) argued that the authority of the Bible lay in the truth it conveyed rather than in its literal wording. This perspective was at odds with evangelical views, which equated the authority of the Bible with divine truth (Hankins 26), and, by the very first years of the 20th century, modernism had

significantly altered traditional Christian beliefs and led to controversy over doctrines such as the virgin birth and the resurrection. Moreover, modernists often reinterpreted these events in naturalistic or symbolic terms, further distancing themselves from Protestant supernaturalism. This theological shift led to significant changes in the major Protestant denominations of the North, challenging the dominance of evangelicalism and provoking a strong evangelical reaction.

In the late 19th century, a theological conflict was brewing between fundamentalists and modernists. Both modernists and fundamentalists sought to reduce Christianity to its essentials, but their approaches differed significantly: modernists focused on Jesus-inspired religious experience and social progress, which fundamentalists found insufficient as it left out important doctrines, while evangelicals believed that establishing a basic framework of faith was crucial to resisting modernism. However, it was not until after the 1920s that their boundaries solidified. Many theologians accepted some modernist views but held on to basic evangelical beliefs, so a middle ground was found. In the meantime, most churchgoers were unaware of these theological disputes and stuck to their traditional evangelical beliefs. Nevertheless, the First World War would soon change the landscape and bring these issues to the fore (30).

1.2.2 The Social Gospel

Politicians did not immediately understand how the industrial boom fundamentally changed the economy and American society. The power of industrial magnates had grown enormously, leaving no room for local business and enterprise and exploiting workers, while government control over them remained antiquated and virtually ineffective. Despite the efforts of Protestants to maintain unity, significant divisions arose, particularly due to developments in American liberalism as the new century approached, and questions arose about biblical miracles and the divine inspiration of the Bible. As a result, theologians had to evolve and adapt to keep pace with the ever-changing American society. Some embraced new philosophical traditions, especially those that allowed them to combat socioeconomic inequality better (Evans 221).

This new interpretation, known as the Social Gospel, was not a monolithic movement but rather the work of various religious leaders who sought to use religion to solve contemporary social problems (urbanization, immigration, industrialization, etc.). As a movement, it flourished primarily among denominations, which quickly evolved from

"scattered" voluntary churches to centralized denominational bodies and ecumenical organizations linked (and funded) by networks of philanthropists, politicians, church and business leaders. In this sense, the Social Gospel continued the evangelical tradition of adapting Christian doctrines to social issues and postmillennialism, believing in changing the world through Christian conversion (222). Nevertheless, Social Gospel proponents were primarily rooted in white middle-class Protestant culture, espoused anti-Catholic, and Christian triumphalist views, and ignored important issues.

One of the earliest influences of the Social Gospel was Philadelphia Baptist preacher Russell Conwell (1843-1925). For many Protestants drawn to the Social Gospel, Christianity needed to convey the evangelical message of personal conversion to make the nation more just and lead Americans to reevaluate the nation's social structures in business and government (224): in other words, the personal conversion should be a collective conversion to change the socio-economic structures that cause poverty and marginalization.

The Social Gospel was not only the result of the work of the clergy but also the efforts of women's organizations. Influenced by the Lutheran women's movements in Germany who worked in hospitals as nurses, American women organized denominational missionary programs inside and outside the country to help those in need. These organizations, known as the Women's Home Missionary Movement (or Deaconess Movement), grew rapidly in the last two decades of the 19th century and were adopted by many American Protestant churches, particularly the Baptists and Methodists.

Deaconess groups often resembled a canonical Protestant religious order, but, unlike earlier evangelical models, these groups were mainly composed of single women working on the front lines of urban missions, particularly in larger cities. In addition, the female home missionaries not only provided spiritual care but also introduced members to Christian sociology, which blended contemporary sociological and economic theories with the social teachings of Jesus, as well as "domestic feminism," a combination of the conservative model of women's leadership with radical criticism of socio-economic conditions (225). One of the most famous exponents of this theory was the second president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU, 1873), Frances Willard (1839-1898), who firmly believed in women's right to preach and advocated for their ordination, attacking prevailing views with biblical and pragmatic arguments. Willard also became involved in utopian political movements, supporting labor unions, anti-monopoly laws, and women's suffrage, paving the way for the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (226).

The Women's Missionary Societies and the WCTU are examples of how Protestants organized to meet societal needs. Another notable example of inner-city missions that continued their reform efforts might be the Salvation Army, founded in London in 1865 by William Booth (1829-1912). The Social Gospel, while appreciative of their efforts, considered them insufficient to effect broader social change (228). In addition, post-Civil War America struggled with growing tensions between business and labor, prompting church leaders to advocate for an even more active role for Christians in addressing social and economic problems.

The most famous preacher who, under the influence of Horace Bushnell's theology, emphasized that socio-economic reform could be achieved through Christian ethical principles was Washington Gladden (1836-1918). Gladden was not a supporter of socialism but engaged in urban politics and wrote extensively on how Christianity should address socioeconomic problems. He was recognized as one of the leading figures of American progressivism, and his theology resonated widely, earning him the title "Father of the Social Gospel," and even influenced later productions such as William Stead's (1849-1912) *If Christ Came to Chicago!* (1894) and Charles Sheldon's (1857-1946) *In His Steps* (1897) (230).

In the last decade of the 19th century, a new branch of social Christianity emerged: "Christian socialism," a current of thought that had its origins in Europe and combined the teachings of the Bible with socialism (232). By the last decade of the century, this movement had arrived in America and was adapted to its social structure. One of its best-known representatives was George Herron (1862-1925), who was inspired by Italian political leader Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) and Christian ascetics such as St. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226).

In contrast to the social Christians, Herron advocated a national conversion and a complete reversal of social values, taking Jesus' blessing for the poor literally. From 1894 to 1899, Herron led a group of Protestant leaders who believed political socialism could bring economic and moral reform. Herron also spoke at major universities, advocating personal sacrifice and regeneration to redeem the nation. He emphasized individual repentance and suffering for others and wanted to change institutions from individualistic to collectivist goals. Although his message waned around 1900, and his public career ended abruptly after a scandal, his message was deeply rooted in denominational structures and challenged future Social Gospel leaders: integrating Christian theology with concrete sociopolitical reform (233).

Among George Herron's contemporaries who also sought to challenge the power structures of capitalism, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) has attracted the most attention

from historians. Rauschenbusch was a New York Baptist pastor who joined the Rochester Theological Seminary faculty in 1897 (234). He became famous for his 1907 book *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, giving the social gospel an organizational center: the Federal Council of Churches (1908). His later writings continued to influence American and international audiences and continued the legacy of the social gospel in the 20th century.

Moreover, seeing the social misery in the United States, he firmly believed that Protestant churches could lead the Christianization of America. His mission was influenced by the German liberalism of the late 19th century and, although he did not work directly with Herron, tied in with Herron's passion for the theological ideal of the Kingdom of God, believing that understanding the Kingdom of God through the early Christian communities was the key to Christianity today. On the other hand, his theology combined piety with a conciliatory attitude towards his opponents (235). Politically, he identified as a socialist, although he never joined the American Socialist Party, and even supported women's suffrage but held conservative views on the role of women and was concerned about social changes that affected the moral compass of the nation (237). By the end of World War I, however, he became an outsider in the movement, as his German American heritage made him suspect (236).

At the end of World War I, some Protestant ministers whom the Social Gospel influenced left the ministry because they believed that institutional Christianity could not change socioeconomic power. These people often turned to politics. Some of them even played a role in the founding of the American Civil Liberties Union in 1919. Others, like former Presbyterian minister Norman Thomas (1884-1968), devoted themselves to democratic socialism. Thomas became the leading figure of the American Socialist Party for four decades.

Christian African Americans also participated in the movement, even if the goals of the Social Gospel differed significantly. The most famous representative was certainly Reverdy Ransom (1861-1959), a preacher of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (237).

When the U.S. joined the war, Social Gospel adherents and conservative Protestants viewed the war as a holy crusade. They all shared themes of patriotism and American exceptionalism, and many social gospel advocates saw the war as a necessary evil to create a post-war world in which churches would lead to the realization of the Kingdom of God. However, the Social Gospel struggled to find lasting support among the working-class Americans it most wanted to help. Leaders like Gladden and Rauschenbusch were aware of this divide and attempted to bridge it through popular entertainment and music, but despite these efforts, their success was primarily institutional (242). Moreover, this vision began to fade as soon as the war ended.

1.3 Neo-evangelicalism: From the 1930s to the 1950s

If, on the one hand, the 1920s can be seen as a time of reform and homogenization efforts, a real, if temporary, victory for conservative Christianity (Williams 97), the 1930s were the years of the Great Depression, a time characterized by poverty against which only the Social Gospel could do anything.

New theologians emerged, such as Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), who combined Rauschenbusch's social concerns with a theological framework influenced by the European "crisis theology" of the post-war period, which rejected the liberal Protestant tendency to trivialize human sinfulness and instead drew on theologians such as Augustine, Luther, Calvin and Kierkegaard to gain a more realistic view of the corruption of human nature through the sin of Adam and Eve (102). Niebuhr's theology, also known as "Christian realism," sought to apply Christian ethics to secular issues such as politics and socioeconomic issues. However, the rise of totalitarianism in Europe caused these efforts to fall apart: while some theologians condemned the Soviet and Nazi regimes, others were drawn to Hitler's project, seeing him as a savior and preserver of the natural order (103).

Moreover, after the Scopes Trial, American religious communities underwent a profound transformation that led to a loss of interest in Protestantism, particularly because of its unquestioned cultural authority, division into irreconcilable factions, and difficulty engaging with the broader culture, especially on an intellectual level. During this phase, European religious minority communities gradually integrated into the American mainstream, with Catholics and Jews freeing themselves from Protestant intolerance (111). Protestantism eventually returned in the 1950s by attracting the white suburban population and 'captivating' them through television. Billy Graham's neo-evangelicalism, however, once again changed the structure of Protestantism by positioning itself in the middle between liberalism and fundamentalism, bridging the gap between these two factions.

1.3.1 Between the World Wars

The 1920s are often seen as the time when Americans embraced modernity and turned away from religion, but, as seen, history is more complex than that. While some traditional forms of Christianity did accept and adapt to modernity, these were also the years of the Scopes trial and anti-Darwin laws (Evans 281). Moreover, despite the turmoil within American Christianity, a

strong current of popular religion continued to emphasize that Christianity offered spiritual solace and the potential for health, fame, and fortune. On the other hand, Prohibition, which was strongly supported by Protestants, proved to be a disastrous failure: regular churchgoers consumed alcohol, organized crime flourished, and authorities failed to enforce the law. In addition, the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression profoundly impacted Americans, both financially and existentially (Fitzgerald 144). As the Great Depression worsened, American churches declined despite the best efforts of various leaders within both Catholicism and Protestantism (Evans 283).

After the war, Catholic and Protestant churches experienced membership losses as the belief grew that churches could not adequately address the socioeconomic instability of the 1930s (287). Even revivalist preachers lost their audiences and were forced to preach in smaller towns. The only national "revivalist" of those years was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), who addressed the nation, albeit in entirely secular terms (Fitzgerald 144). For American Protestantism, the cause of this decline lay partly in the denominational divisions following the Scopes Trial and partly in the hostility between the supporters of the Social Gospel and those who longed for the "old-time religion" they had experienced in their youth (Evans 287).

Fundamentalism suffered a sudden setback after the Scopes trial and was pushed to the margins of American society, with some leaders drifting into bigotry and political extremism, reinforcing liberal criticism. In the last years of the 1920s, for example, Baptist preacher J. Frank Norris (1877-1952) attacked Catholics, claiming they wanted to overthrow the government and the Constitution and warn of violent consequences for Protestants. In the 1930s, this type of preaching flourished, especially among leaders such as Arno Gaebelein (1861-1945), James M. Gray (1851-1935), William B. Riley (1861-1947), and Gerald Winrod (1900-1957). Riley and Winrod, both strong antisemites, in particular, accused the Jews of taking over American finance, courts, and media (Fitzgerald 144). They also associated the New Deal with the Antichrist, mainly because they chose the eagle (the symbol of the Beast) as the insignia of the National Recovery Administration (NIRA, 1933-1945). In addition, some fundamentalist leaders became Nazi sympathizers, such as the Catholic priest Charles Coughlin (1891-1979) and the Protestant Gerald L. K. Smith (1898-1976), who praised Hitler for liberating Germany from "atheistic communism" with divine help (145).

Despite all this, liberal Protestantism, or what eventually would have been called mainline Protestantism, was not entirely without influence on social transformation movements, and Protestant leaders were not lacking in institutional successes (Evans 290). For example,

preachers such as J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937) stood out in the 1920s and 1930s for their intellectual rigor and critical view of modernity. Indeed, Machen succeeded in raising questions about doctrine, the nature of the Christian life, and the relationship between Christianity and culture. Moreover, his belief in liberalism as the death of Christianity was supported even by people who did not favor fundamentalism, such as the journalist H. L. Mencken (1880-1956) (291).

American Christianity underwent an adjustment and realignment between the world wars, attempting to redefine its identity in an increasingly diverse religious landscape. The outbreak of World War II, however, seemed to temporarily interrupt this conflict and revitalize the role of Christianity in national life, foregrounding the importance of faith itself rather than specific doctrines (292).

1.3.2 World War II and The Postwar Years

If American churches were still divided over involvement in the European conflict at the beginning of World War II in 1939, they quickly became united in support of the war effort after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, even though some leaders remained pacifists and hoped that victory over the Axis powers would promote interchurch cooperation and create a just international political order. A key figure in this era was G. Bromley Oxnam (1891-1963), a prominent social reformer elected Methodist bishop in 1936 who aimed to mobilize church resources for the war effort and prepare for a peaceful postwar world. This mission was taken up by the Federal Council of Churches, which recommended reforms to promote church unity and global peace (Evans 297). However, a small group of evangelicals viewed these efforts with suspicion, seeing them as a sign of the end times and part of an international conspiracy linked to the Antichrist as interpreted in the Book of Revelation (298).

At the end of World War II, America experienced an economic boom that created new social and economic opportunities and hosted a new era of the "American Dream." The suburbs, in particular, were increasingly inhabited by middle-class Americans who could afford affordable properties away from city centers (299). As suburban communities grew, so did the churches as the suburbs reflected the values of their predominantly white, middle-class, and economically mobile parishioners, a fertile ground for Protestant churches and congregations (300). Despite the outcome of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy being seen as a victory for modernism, with liberals taking control of seminaries and leadership roles in major northern

denominations, many of the new churchgoers were fundamentalists and others evangelical conservatives. Smaller conservative denominations and "Northern European" denominations also flourished, adopting fundamentalist characteristics as they integrated into American society (Fitzgerald 146).

Moreover, fundamentalists established seminaries and liberal arts colleges, focusing on pastoral training for students without college degrees and post-baccalaureate. Summer Bible conferences brought large groups together annually, and enthusiasm for missions fostered cooperation among far-flung congregations. Particularly, they focused on overseas evangelism efforts, sending hundreds of missionaries yearly. By 1950, fundamentalist publications increased in number and circulation, and with the advent of commercial radio, fundamentalist evangelists quickly adopted it as a medium, buying airtime and funding it through audience appeals, a practice avoided by mainline ministers (149).

However, over time, fundamentalists became increasingly isolated from other Protestants and the broader society, splitting into two currents: one focused on maintaining doctrinal purity (without any compromise), and the other aimed at reclaiming America (and the world) through evangelizing revivals (147). The two currents eventually materialized in two physical factions: the separatists, militant and often political extremists, and the evangelicals, which aimed to regain their cultural hegemony (148).

A prominent figure in the religious revivals of the 1950s was Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993), a pastor best known for popularizing the concept of positive thinking. Peale's theology, rooted in liberalism and New Thought, was influenced by the self-help traditions of American Protestantism and emphasized the use of faith to improve one's life (304). Politically, however, he was a staunch anti-communist and supported Republican leaders. His rise to national prominence came with his 1952 bestseller, *The Power of Positive Thinking*, in which he promoted faith as a remedy for personal fears, leading to prosperity and happiness. Despite criticism from other Protestant leaders for his superficiality and lack of intellectual depth, Peale's message resonated with many white suburbanites who feared the Cold War. His sermons, radio programs, television appearances, and publications spread his message of religion as a source of personal comfort and resilience (Evans 305).

Despite the significant changes in American society and religious life, there were also voices pointing to the uncertainties regarding the future of religion in America. The skepticism of the 1920s and 1930s about the political ambitions of mainline Protestantism turned into a witch hunt after the war: the anxiety of many Americans, who feared that radical clergymen were pointing to communist infiltration of the churches after the war, morphed into Cold War

anti-communist hysteria. Indeed, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HCUA, 1938) and a Senate investigative committee led by Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957) conducted high-profile hearings targeting various Americans, including religious leaders, for alleged ties to the Communist Party (301). Some preachers exemplified this disillusionment, such as Paul Tillich (1886-1965), a German American Lutheran theologian and existentialist philosopher. Tillich's most famous book, *The Courage to Be* (1952), illustrates this fear by emphasizing that "the courage to be is rooted in the God who appeared when God disappeared in the fear of doubt" (Tillich n.p.). Tillich's work suggested that religion was essential to modern life, but its relevance and value would be increasingly questioned in the generations to come (Evans 307).

1.3.3 The 1950s: Billy Graham and Neo-Evangelicalism

While many Americans found solace in the teachings of Peale or the existentialism of Paul Tillich, Billy Graham (1918-2018) was the figure who best epitomized the popular religious revival of the 1950s, and his success demonstrated the appeal of theological conservatism, underscored by his apolitical message, similar to Peale's, which emphasized that Christianity must confront communism rather than run away from it in fear. Moreover, Graham revolutionized American evangelicalism, laying the base for evangelicalism as we know it today.

Graham's career began in the late 1940s, and by the late 1950s, his crusades, sponsored by both evangelical and traditional churches, attracted thousands of people, and were watched by millions on television (307). His preaching style was rooted in the revivalist tradition, emphasizing a piety similar to the free-will evangelicalism of the Second Great Awakening and aimed at Christians of diverse backgrounds. The most interesting aspect of his long-lasting preaching career was his success in spreading conservative Protestant theology nationwide, even in liberal Protestant strongholds, thanks to his eloquence and charisma, which resonated with many Americans who associated Christian values with patriotism. Over the years, various presidents frequently invited him to the White House to provide spiritual counsel and emphasize a shared faith (Evans 308).

After he graduated from Wheaton College (Illinois) in 1943, he joined Youth for Christ (YFC, 1944), a worldwide Christian movement whose primary goal is to spread evangelism among young people. As a field worker organizing local YFC units, he embarked on an evangelistic marathon that took him through forty-seven states, most Canadian provinces, and

Europe in just three years. During this time, his preaching style developed, and he learned how to organize large meetings, address business and civic groups, and attract the attention of the press. In 1945, he met an enthusiastic Riley, who appointed him as his successor, a role Graham reluctantly accepted after Riley's death two years later (Fitzgerald 172). Feeling uncomfortable in his new role and more interested in evangelism, Graham spent little time at Northwestern and resigned in 1952 after an internal conflict between separatists.

Despite this short parenthesis, Graham traveled the country, preaching against liberal corruption and seeking to restore "old-fashioned religion" (173). However, the Cold War reached a point of no return, with the Soviet Union successfully testing an atomic bomb, a piece of information that came at the right time, and Graham cleverly used it to demonstrate his urgency. He spoke, in particular, of a world divided into two irreconcilable camps: on one side, Western culture based on the Bible, and on the other, communism, which he described as "a religion inspired, directed and motivated by the devil himself, who has declared war on Almighty God" (174). These first crusades were moderately successful, but the turning point came when Stuart Hamblen (1908-1989), a former rodeo star with a popular radio show, announced that Graham had rescued him. His audience grew, Hollywood stars came, telegrams and news magazines covered the events, and after another four weeks, Graham became a national celebrity.

Thanks to this wave of publicity, Graham arrived in Boston six weeks into his final tour and was invited to preach at Harold Ockenga's (1905-1985) Park Street Church. Ockenga, however, was skeptical about Graham, as the young preacher had never attended a theological school, but soon changed his mind: Graham did indeed fill the Park Street Church, Mechanics Hall, the Opera House, and finally the Boston Garden, leaving thousands of people on the streets. Not only that, but at the invitation of numerous ministers, he returned in the spring, preaching in all the major New England cities and culminating with a rally on Boston Common, where George Whitefield had preached in 1740.

The success and the strength of Billy Graham as a preacher was his background and education, which positioned him perfectly to preach the national revival of conservative Protestantism that Ockenga and his fellow National Association of Evangelicals (NAE, 1942) leaders envisioned. Graham, indeed, held orthodox views on biblical infallibility, the virgin birth, and the Second Coming, but he was outside the modernist-fundamentalist battles and did not bear the scars of those conflicts (175). Moreover, he understood that people were not that interested in doctrinal disputes or denominational differences. The simplicity of his sermons and his undeniable charisma could speak to both Southerners and Northerners, something that

not even Dwight Moody could achieve. After the New England revival, Graham continued his successful tour of the country, holding his "crusades" in various cities, attracting between 300,000 and 500,000 people (176).

In 1950, he founded the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA), a non-profit organization whose goal was (and still is) to mobilize churches, form local committees to raise funds, train volunteers, and promote evangelistic media and crusades. Their events attracted thousands of people, politicians, and even celebrities, such as actress Dale Evans (1912-2001) and her husband Roy Rogers (1911-1998). In addition, a weekly live radio program, "Hour of Decision," was established to broadcast Graham's sermons, a successful initiative that reached fifteen million listeners in the U.S. and abroad (178).

By 1954, Graham had held crusades in twenty-five major American cities, reaching almost eight million people. However, Graham had moved on: he traded in his colorful looks and slogans for a more conservative, tailored suit and a more deliberate speaking style. Thematically, he moved away from literal interpretations of the Bible and instead focused on the spiritual nature of concepts such as heaven, hell, and apocalypse, often comparing the latter to secular threats such as communism, nuclear war, and the danger of World War III. At the time, Graham moved into high social circles and was supported by influential businessmen, politicians, and even presidents such as Eisenhower, with whom Graham held differing theological and foreign policy views but agreed on the role of religion in perilous times, and Nixon (179). His real goal, however, was to win over mainstream Protestants to his revivalist cause, which he succeeded in doing to some degree, though not as much as he had hoped (186).

The greatest challenge came from the fundamentalist clergy who supported his crusades, especially outside the South, which alienated most mainline clergy. As a result, Graham had to cancel several crusades, especially those in New York in 1951 and 1953, because the fundamentalist sponsors made up only a small portion of the city's clergy. This situation finally changed in the spring of 1954, when he organized a meeting in London: the English Protestant clergy was not divided by a militant fundamentalist movement as it was in America, and conservative evangelicals were integrated into most denominations. This event changed the cards on the table. Graham was convinced that he could also appeal to the major North American denominations if he and his allies could distance themselves from the negative reputation of the fundamentalists (187).

To realize his plan, he resumed an old project: a journal of scholarly articles, news, and reviews for clergy aimed at lending theological respectability to evangelicals and appealing to men in mainline denominations who were open to biblical faith. A year later, in the spring of

1955, J. Howard Pew (1882-1971) of the Sun Oil Company (Sunoco, 1886) provided seed money of $150,000 for the first two years and promised more funding for several more years. Thus, *Christianity Today* was finally born (188) and placed in the hands of Carl F. H. Henry (1913-2003), an evangelical theologian and respected scholar. At first, Henry hesitated because he feared his firm conservative beliefs would not align with the magazine's direction. He was a strong proponent of biblical inerrancy and believed in the supremacy of evangelicalism over liberalism. However, he also believed in the importance of social reform as part of the Christian message and criticized the fundamentalists for neglecting social issues. The first issue of *Christianity Today* appeared in October 1956, and by the following spring, the magazine had gained paid subscribers and was receiving attention in the secular press (189). Furthermore, Graham's crusade continued.

While, in a 1956 interview, he rejected the term fundamentalism as an expression of narrow-mindedness, bigotry, extremism, or lack of social conscience, in 1957, he accepted an invitation from the Council of the City of New York (CCCNY, 1815) to hold a crusade in Madison Square Garden, angering the fundamentalist clergy who had invited him several times (190-91). When the crusade began in May, the fundamentalists split into two factions: "neo-evangelicals," who supported Graham, and militant separatists, who were later associated with the term "fundamentalists" and believed he had betrayed their cause (192).

This newly discovered environment fostered a sense of unity among Protestants, with even liberal leaders such as John A. Mackay (1889-1983), president of Princeton Seminary, calling for an end to fundamentalist and modernist labels. Soon, the term "evangelical" was frequently used by journalists to describe moderate conservative Protestants and, sometimes, the "born-again" believers, while, in the 1970s, many conservatives began to use the term not to feel estranged from their tradition (207).

1.4 Renovation and Innovation: The Second Half of the 20th Century

While in the first half of the 20th century, liberal Protestantism seemed to dominate the culture, and conservatives were forced to retreat from public life, the second half of the century changed the scenario. Although American society flourished after the Second World War, a new fear began to spread from the 1950s onwards: communism. The so-called Red Scare was the opportunity the fundamentalists had been waiting for, and by addressing it in their sermons, the preachers were able to attract large numbers of parishioners who felt abandoned by everyone else. In the 1950s and 1960s, the rise of Billy Graham and the neo-evangelicals, as well as the

Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., made these initial changes even more pronounced and paved the way for the political involvement of (neo-)evangelicals that culminated in the 1980s with the Raegan presidency. It is important to note, however, that this newfound role of evangelicals in the mainstream was not peaceful or accepting but was characterized by the rivalry between faith and science that energized the movement and eventually led to its second rise and that liberal Protestantism did not die, but merely flickered strongly (Marsden n.p).

Throughout the 20th century, the relationship between fundamentalists, evangelicals, and science was tense, for while fundamentalists and evangelicals were once at the center of intellectual life in Europe and America, in the last century, they experienced an intellectual disaster, a fall from grace, mainly because of their conservative views that left no room for dialog. The situation changed slightly in the last decades of the 20th century when some aimed to revive Galileo's two-book approach, meaning the perfect blend of science and religion, as an alternative to evolutionist exclusive teachings. Despite their defeats across the country, various polling data collected in those years show that most Americans believe that creationism and evolution should be taught in public schools, suggesting that religion and science have common ground in American culture (Hankins 79).

1.4.1 Evangelical Political Activism: The Civil Rights Era and Beyond

Over the 20th century, and especially after the 1930s, religion became a central issue in presidential campaigns. This shift was largely due to the influence of the Christian right, whose key figures embedded themselves in the Republican Party as labor unions did in the Democratic Party in the 1960s. Initially seen as a threat to democratic norms, the Christian Right has become the largest constituency of the Republican Party in the last years of the century, a fixture of American politics (Hankins 158).

However, it is essential to note that, despite these two groups being important, evangelicals are diverse, and their views are not only varied but also fluid and complex. Most evangelicals, indeed, do not seek to impose their values on others, often believing that America was never a truly Christian nation. Moreover, contrary to stereotypes on the Christian Right, most evangelicals support civility and tolerance and reject efforts to enforce Christian values on non-Christians. Generally, they seek to influence culture through personal example and relationships rather than through coercion, and their interests are to be considered in a pluralistic democracy (160).

The idea that religion and politics should remain separate has its roots in political liberalism as, in a diverse democracy, the ethics of good and evil should not be part of legal and political discussions. In a pluralistic society, consensus on such issues is unattainable, as it would impose a definition rather than allowing people to decide for themselves. Some political theorists even argue that while it is permissible for religious people to base their political views on their faith, they should use non-religious arguments in public debates and that if they cannot provide secular reasons for their positions, they should refrain from participating in public discourse. Americans have widely accepted this view, although, more recently, the personal affairs of candidates are no longer considered taboo (138). In addition, many evangelicals and fundamentalists avoided mixing religion and politics for several reasons, such as adherence to theological and cultural separatism, believing that politics was a secular distraction from their primary focus on evangelism and missions (139). However, between the 1950s and the 1960s, something changed.

On December 1, 1955, Rosa Parks, an African American woman, refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to a white man who boarded the bus after her. This rebellion sparked the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, often considered the most prophetic religious movement for social change in American history. Ethnicity has always been one of the most important debate topics in American history, but most preachers ignored the issue or labeled it as a Southern problem that was difficult to analyze and adequately address (Evans 311). Eventually, the situation changed in the 1940s, when the Northern and Southern women's organizations, firmly committed to racial equality, had to complete their efforts for women's rights. They primarily offered classes and seminars in nonviolent direct action, attended by people like Rosa Parks. The civil rights movement's success was based on the great diversity of individuals and associations like this one who sought to form alliances across ideological lines and played a key role in fundraising for the movement.

On the other hand, the heart and soul, the public and actively militant role of the movement was the network of African American religious communities scattered throughout the South and centered around the charismatic leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. Born in Atlanta, King embraced the legacy of African American Christianity, in which ministers were expected to be more than fiery preachers, representing their church and the broader black community within the dominant white power structure (312). If initially reluctant, when he was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association in December 1955, King urged the Montgomery City Council to desegregate public transportation the following year. Media

coverage of this event brought King and his efforts to the nation's attention and ultimately led the Supreme Court to declare racial segregation on public transportation unconstitutional.

King's success has always been attributed to his intelligence, charisma, and ability to bring a distinctive tradition of African American Christianity to the national stage. His career as a leader only proves this, especially when one considers his "I Have a Dream" speech," delivered in August 1963 during the March on Washington, in which he articulated a religious vision that was both transcendent and uniquely American, as well as the Voting Rights March from Selma to Montgomery (1965), which led to the signing of the historic Voting Rights Act in the summer of that year (314).

This sudden change, however, caused outrage among fundamentalists and many evangelicals. For example, the Baptist televangelist Jerry Falwell (1933-2007) addressed this issue in his sermon, "Ministers and Marchers," explaining that King's calling was to preach the gospel, not engage in politics. This position reflected the nineteenth-century Southern phenomenon known as the "spiritualization of the church," which concerned itself only with spiritual matters and left politics to the secular realm. Exceptions were made for moral issues such as gambling or alcohol. Southern Christians often supported laws to regulate or prohibit these practices but believed that churches should not engage in politics (Hankins 139).

1.4.1.1 The Christian Right: Old Religious Right and New Religious Right

From the 1930s to the 1970s, some fundamentalists, who rejected liberal political theory and the spiritualization of the church to engage in selected political causes, were deeply involved in politics and formed the Old Religious Right (a term that emerged later to distinguish them from the New Religious Right). Key figures in this first wave were Carl McIntire (1906-2002) and Billy James Hargis (1925-2004), who used radio to promote a blend of fundamentalist religion, American patriotism, and intense anti-communism. The Old Religious Right was often seen as lunatic radicals for their extreme actions and conspiracy theories (Hankins 139). For example, in the 1960s, McIntire relocated his broadcast to a ship in international waters, mimicking Radio Free Europe, which broadcasted U.S.-sponsored programs into Communist countries, to spread his message and ideas. On the other hand, Hargis's crusade was not only against communism but also against the teaching of sex education in schools as a government attempt to undermine traditional morality. However, despite this, the Old Religious Right had an extensive mailing list and tens of thousands of subscribers to their periodicals. After the

Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, the Old Religious Right evolved and adapted to the changes in American society (140).

The New Religious Right, or Christian Right, aligned firmly with the Republican Party and shared with other more moderate movements the aim to ban sex education as it was promoting anti-Christian morality by not condemning homosexuality and sex outside of marriage. In 1969, they hosted a meeting, the National Convention on the Crisis in Education, which united representatives from 22 states against sex education and supported reintroducing prayer in schools (141). Moreover, they supported George McGovern's presidential campaign in 1972 and Jimmy Carter's in 1976 (Evans 333-334).

Jimmy Carter, the first Southerner elected president since the Reconstruction, was a "born-again" Christian who taught Sunday school and was crucial in mobilizing evangelicals. His religious background intrigued the media and his open discussion about his faith marked a shift in how religion was perceived in presidential politics. However, his progressive politics and economic and foreign policy issues distanced evangelicals, who found their new champion in Ronald Reagan and, later, in Richard Nixon (Hankins 142).

In the late 1970s, conservative Republicans met with Falwell to develop a strategy to mobilize evangelicals. They recognized that most evangelicals were inherently conservative and needed to be organized into a strong voting bloc within the Republican Party, with Falwell playing a significant role. Jerry Falwell, one of the most famous televangelists of the time, spent the first thirty years of his ministry as a separatist fundamentalist and avoided politics. However, he was intrigued by the efforts of conservative Republicans and eventually changed his mind (146). In May 1979, conservative activist Paul Weyrich (1942-2008) met with Falwell in Lynchburg, and the two discussed the existence of a "moral majority" among Protestant Americans who agreed on certain issues but were divided by geography and denomination and the need to unite these people to gain political influence. Seizing both the opportunity and the term used by Weyrich, Falwell founded the Moral Majority, which would soon become the most influential and visible organization of the New Religious Right (147).

In 1981, Ronald Reagan won a decisive victory over Carter by receiving 41% of the electoral vote. Although he would have won in any event without the support of evangelicals, his election marked the beginning of a political shift that solidified evangelicals as a core Republican constituency and gave the New Religious Right significant influence within the party. Moreover, the Moral Majority's inclusive approach, which welcomed all religious conservatives, including Catholics and Jews, also pointed to a new era of cooperation between evangelicals and Catholics that had not existed before. As a result, the Moral Majority and other

organizations sought to integrate themselves into the party structure, taking clear stands on a range of issues, including abortion, school prayer, and the free-market economic policies of the Reagan administration (148). Falwell's Moral Majority received the most media attention among New Religious Right groups, but in the 1990s, its hegemony ended, leaving the stage for the Christian Coalition of Pat Robertson (1930-2023).

Roberson was a charismatic minister who experienced Pentecostal spiritual gifts but did not belong to a Pentecostal denomination. Robertson was indeed primarily a religious broadcaster, unlike other key figures in the early New Religious Right movement. He was not one of the pastors who worked with Falwell to found the Moral Majority, as the two were likely religious rivals. Throughout the long sixties, Robertson avoided politics, even declining to endorse his father's re-election for the Senate in 1966 (149). In the 1980s, however, he changed his mind, and by the middle of the decade, Robertson was actively involved in politics (150). However, a major scandal in the 1990s abruptly ended his career and eventually led to a significant drop in donations to Robertson, Falwell, and other televangelists, with 65% of Americans having an unfavorable attitude toward televangelists (152).

Unlike Falwell's Moral Majority, which was led primarily by pastors, the Christian Coalition was led by lay people from evangelical churches. This change allowed the coalition to focus on influencing policy from the grassroots rather than seeking the presidency first: the Christian community needed to focus on local politics, such as school boards and city councils, rather than just national campaigns. This approach eventually led to the Christian Right becoming a significant part of the Republican Party with 300 out of 2,000 delegates for the Christian Coalition at the 1992 Republican National Convention, a number that rose to 500 by 1996 (155). By the 1990s, the Christian Right had been so effectively integrated into the Republican Party that a single dominant organization was no longer necessary (156).

1.4.1.2 The Christian Left: The Sojourners Community

While the Christian right dominates the religious-political field, there is also a notable evangelical left, albeit on a smaller scale. The Sojourners Community stands out as the most consistent and influential organization.

The Sojourners Community was founded in the 1970s by a group of students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS, 1897) in Deerfield, Illinois, under James E. Wallis Jr.'s (1948) leadership. Wallis grew up in an evangelical church and, like other evangelical colleagues, was disillusioned by the racism within his church and the lack of emphasis on

poverty. In his youth, he was active in the civil rights movement and against the Vietnam War (156). In the 1970s, he and some colleagues founded a magazine, later renamed *Sojourners*, to discuss social issues and justice and the relationship between Christianity and politics. Adopting this alternative evangelical expression, members lived in the community and among the poor. They started tutoring programs and other initiatives and helped numerous children from disadvantaged backgrounds attend college and pursue successful careers. At the same time, the group became involved in national and international peace and justice efforts, including the movement to freeze nuclear weapons and the Free South Africa campaign in the 1980s. (157).

Politically, Wallis and Sojourners were more outspoken than the Christian Right. They support, though not fully, gay rights and marriage, preferring to adopt the 'seamless garment' ethic that supports Joseph Bernardin's (1928-1996) idea that all life is sacred and should be protected by law when it comes to social issues such as abortion, capital punishment, assisted suicide and euthanasia (158).

1.4.2 Contemporary Evangelicalism: The 21st Century

The 1980s and 1990s represented the high point of the Christian right, largely thanks to those who had lived through the social revolution of the 1960s and the 1970s and longed for a past in which white Protestant Christianity was central to American life. The younger generations, however, having internalized the changes wrought by the women's and gay rights movements, were less fearful and angry, and the decline of the Christian Right began earlier than anticipated and was later exacerbated by its close association with George W. Bush. After 2000, the Christian Right needed to reposition itself to find a new strength that would attract younger generations, and so they did. First, they returned to the reformist goals of 19th-century evangelicals, and then, they broadened their agenda by focusing on one of the few issues that the younger generation shared with them: abortion. So, during their debates, it was (and is) common for them to focus on issues such as morality, pro-life, and traditional family (Fitzgerald 626).

In presidential elections, however, the story is somewhat different. Before the primaries, the Christian Right meets with key affiliates and decides who to support based on their religious background and political agenda. In the 2016 Republican Party presidential primaries, for example, Anthony Perkins (1963), the president of the Family Research Council (FRC, 1983), hosted a meeting where the Christian Right decided to support Ted Cruz (1970), a Southern

Baptist, who claimed that America needed to "awaken the body of Christ" to avoid a disaster. In domestic politics, he promised to fight abortion and gay rights in the states and nominate judges who would oppose Supreme Court rulings on marriage, making him an ideal candidate for conservative evangelicals. However, evangelicals surprisingly favored Donald Trump (1946).

However, Donald Trump, a real estate mogul, showed little interest in Christianity, admitting that he preferred profane activities, such as drinking wine, to praying to God or asking him for forgiveness and was not interested in the evangelical social agenda. Moreover, politically, he was more invested in anti-migrant campaigns (627), especially after the terrorist attack in San Bernardino (2015), when he proposed the use of torture methods on suspected Islamic terrorists and the targeting of their families (629). Nevertheless, he received tremendous support and eventually won the elections.

Many evangelical leaders and journalists debated the reasons for this support: some believed that the Christian right had become more secular since the 1980s and prioritized politics over theology, while others felt that Trump's appeal resonated with the prosperity preachers who supported him (629). The simplest explanation, however, is that Trump appealed to the poorest and least educated evangelicals who were more concerned about jobs than social issues such as abortion or gay marriage. They believed in the power of deporting undocumented immigrants and trusted Trump's promise of high tariffs to protect American industry as they feared cultural change from immigrants and wanted a strong leader to defend them against perceived threats from terrorists and liberals. Trump seemed to fulfill this role, promising to "make America great again" and reassuring them about his Supreme Court selections (630).

During the presidential run, some leaders of the Christian Right began to accept Trump and considered him better than Hillary Clinton (1947). However, Albert Mohler (1959), the president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminar (1859, Louisville), stated that a race between Trump and Clinton presented a dilemma for Christian voters and emphasized the need to consider what faithfulness thoughtfully and prayerfully should look like. On the other hand, Russel Moore (1971), editor-in-chief of "Christianity Today," was more resolute: he advocated voting for a third party and not voting for the lesser of two evils, as he could not support a candidate who was pro-abortion, nor one who was pro-life but condoned racial injustice and war crimes. Despite their unity, their leaders could not convince evangelicals to reject a candidate like Trump because the Christian Right was so fragmented that it could no longer mobilize effectively and had no significant national organizations, as was evident in the Republican Party primaries (630).

In addition, white evangelicalism was declining. While white evangelical Protestants made up 22% of the American population in 1998, they made up only 18% in 2014, due in part to the rapid growth of the Latino population, some of whom joined white evangelical churches and made up 24% of evangelicals in 2014 (632). Various religious leaders addressed this problem, emphasizing that American evangelicalism was increasingly multiethnic and dominated by immigrant communities. However, they did not recognize that Latino evangelicals and Catholics tend to vote Democratic.

Also, Millennials, the largest generation alive, were more ethnically diverse and less conservative than their parents. Millennials viewed the federal government and immigration more favorably and were more open-minded about the LGBTQ+ community and other minorities. They were also unaffiliated with any church (35% compared to 23% of all adults), meaning they overshadowed evangelicals and, more importantly, were more likely to vote Democrat (633).

For over thirty years, leaders of the Christian Right successfully unified evangelicals around a vision of restoration, securing their support for the Republican Party in exchange for opposition to abortion and gay rights. However, more than this strategy is required: evangelicalism is experiencing a decline, with even its leaders expressing skepticism about the practicability of "Christianizing" America through legislative means (635). Despite Trump's victory, the aspirations of progressives are directed toward the future, anticipating a time when Latinos and younger white evangelicals will possess the electoral strength to replace their representatives (636).

CHAPTER 2
AMERICAN CREATIONISM:
FROM BIBLICAL LITERALISM TO INTELLIGENT DESIGN

A few decades after Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), the theory of evolution gained wide acceptance among American scientists, and even some religious leaders began to support it, leading many to predict the decline of belief in a unique creation. Contrary to the expectations of liberals and the concerns of conservatives, however, creationism did not completely disappear. Many English-speaking Christians, especially in North America, continued to hold to a traditional interpretation of Genesis and periodically, especially in the 1920s and then again from the 1960s onwards, made efforts to oppose the spread of the theory of evolution. Moreover, most Americans had no reason to oppose the teaching of creationism in public schools. According to a 1991 Gallup poll, 47% of respondents still believed that God created man in his present form at some point within the last 10,000 years (Numbers, *The Creationists* 6). In addition, two states, Arkansas and Louisiana, have enacted laws mandating equal treatment of creationism and evolution. Although the courts later declared these laws unconstitutional, the creationist movement remained strong into the 1990s.

Initially, in the late 19th century, conservative Christian thinkers generally accepted that the Bible could support the idea of an ancient earth and life before the time of Eden. In particular, they embraced the findings of historical geology by interpreting the "days" of Genesis as either long periods of time (the day-age theory) or by separating an initial creation from the later six-day creation of Eden (the gap theory). In this way, they defended the Bible's accuracy while accepting geology and paleontology's discoveries (7). However, with the new century approaching, everything changed.

At the beginning of the 20th century, academics and non-academics returned to a literal interpretation of the Scripture, compressing the history of life on Earth to less than ten thousand years and attributing much of the fossil record to the brief period of the Flood and its aftermath (8). This new theory, "flood geology," initially found little support, and it was only with the revival of creationism in the 1960s, culminating in the publication of *Genesis Flood* (1961) and the founding of the Creation Research Society (CRS), that fundamentalists began to interpret Genesis in terms of this theory (9). However, to overcome prejudice and avoid legal consequences, "flood geology" changed its name to "scientific creationism" or "Creation Science" and refrained from referring directly to God, Adam, or Noah (7). By the 1980s,

creation science had become synonymous with creationism, replacing the once-dominant age and gap theories (12).

2.1 Evolution Comes to America: First Reactions

In the 18th century, scientific advances and the increasing emphasis on reason challenged traditional Christian views on nature and theology, with new ideas questioning Genesis and the age of the Earth, the origin of species, and their immutability. One of the most famous contributions from this period, and the first comprehensive theory of evolution, came from Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (1744-1829), a French naturalist who proposed that characteristics developed during a person's life could be passed on to their descendants. Although Lamarck's ideas did not gain widespread support during his lifetime, they were adopted by some Christians who saw them as divine guidance in the evolutionary process. In addition, other scientists and researchers paved the way before Darwin, such as Robert Chambers' *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), which was criticized for its questionable scientific nature.

Nevertheless, Charles Darwin's path to becoming one of the world's leading natural scientists was not straightforward. After completing his studies, he took part in an expedition on the HMS Beagle to South America and the Pacific, where he made crucial discoveries that eventually led him to develop his theory of evolution (Rios 16). Two observations were particularly significant: firstly, his realization that earthquakes continued to shape the Andes. Influenced by Charles Lyell's uniformitarianism34, this led him to reject the idea of catastrophic events in favor of gradual geological changes over long periods of time. Secondly, his observations of biodiversity in the Galapagos Islands suggested that similar gradual changes were occurring in the biological world. Upon his return to England, Darwin formulated his theory of natural selection, influenced by artificial selection, in which desirable traits were selectively bred in animals, and by Thomas Malthus' theories of population dynamics, which proposed that a "struggle for existence" arose because resources were always limited. Darwin observed a similar struggle in nature, which led to the idea of natural selection, where only individuals with advantageous traits would survive and reproduce (17). He finally published his research findings in 1859, entitled *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*. Nevertheless, the scientific community remained divided over Darwinism for several decades. Lamarckian ideas remained popular until the end of the century when genetic advances discredited Lamarck's concept of inherited traits.

However, controversy soon arose over whether the idea of transmutation contradicted the Bible and undermined theological principles, and evangelicals reacted differently. Initially, many expressed skepticism or ignored the issue: with the scientific community still divided, skeptics believed the theory would soon be disproved without interference (18). For others, however, evolution posed a more significant challenge as it questioned the first chapters of Genesis, the authority of the Bible, and established ideas about design in nature without divine intervention. Human evolution, in particular, seemed incompatible with the concept that man was created in the image of God and contradicted doctrines such as the Fall of man and the necessity of salvation (19).

Nevertheless, many evangelicals attempted to reconcile evolution with Christian doctrine as the scientific community increasingly accepted it despite ongoing debates about its mechanisms. For example, Harvard botanist Asa Gray, Darwin's leading naturalist and friend, played a crucial role in accepting evolution in America in the mid-1870s and was a strong proponent of reconciling Christianity and evolution. Although he fully accepted Darwinism from a scientific perspective, Gray disagreed with Darwin's assertion that natural selection undermines the evidence for design – a stance he emphasized in several early reviews of *On the Origin of Species* (25). The geologist James Dwight Dana was another proponent of a teleological interpretation of Darwinism. Between 1860 and 1874, Dana gradually accepted evolution, and in 1883, he recognized natural selection as a key mechanism in the process. In lectures on evolution and theism, Dana assured his students that a divine lawgiver was necessary because evolution worked according to natural laws. Furthermore, Dana encouraged science to search for God's truth. Atheistic interpretations of science should be rejected, but proven truths should be accepted.

Prominent theologians also contributed to integrating design into an evolutionary framework, even if accepting evolution required resolving apparent contradictions with the Bible (26). For example, B. B. Warfield, a strong proponent of biblical inerrancy, argued that Genesis provides a simplified account of creation that the original audience should understand. However, others were less interested in a literal interpretation. For example, James Orr argued that the overall structure of the creation narrative can accommodate scientific claims as long as the idea of design is preserved and human evolution is excluded. Perhaps the most innovative attempt to reconcile Genesis with evolution came from George Warington, a founding member of the Victoria Institute (1865).

In a paper he presented to the Victoria Institute in 1868, Warington reassessed the principles of natural theology as reflected in the biblical creation story and argued that Genesis

supports gradual evolution, claiming that God did not create a perfect universe immediately, but built it up step by step. He pointed out that the earth was initially empty and formless before gradually becoming ordered and populated (27). Warington turned the traditional argument on its head by claiming that science was only catching up with the truths already contained in Genesis. He argued that although evolution had not yet been fully proven, it was consistent with the principle of gradual development described in Genesis. He also claimed that the biblical concept of subordination suggests that creation occurs in successive stages, each laying the foundation for what would follow. Therefore, Warington concluded that the Genesis account allows evolution and even anticipates it when adequately interpreted. The key to reconciling Darwinism with the Bible lay in the concept of the Sabbath: the idea of God's rest implied that creation was not an ongoing, eternal process; God's direct involvement in creation had ended. By reinterpreting the biblical creation story, Warington found support for evolution and the theory of natural selection. Although he took considerable liberties with both Genesis and Darwin's theory, his efforts represented one of the earliest attempts at reconciliation between Christianity and evolution around the turn of the century (28).

2.1.1 Darwinism in the South

Although there are no comprehensive studies of the South's acceptance of evolution, historians have generally asserted that Southerners rejected such concepts, as evidenced by studies of Alexander Winchell (1824-1891) of Vanderbilt College in the 1870s, James Woodrow (1828-1907) of Columbia Theological Seminary in the 1880s, and the Scopes Trial in 1925. In addition, George M. Marsden (1939) claimed that anti-evolutionism was more characteristic of the United States, particularly the South, than other regions or countries and attributed this to the region's more conservative religious views and lower education levels than the North (Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* 58). On the other hand, Numbers' (1942-2023) study, which does not deny the South's opposition to evolution, shows that this opposition was less uniform than is often portrayed (59).

Numerous Southerners advocated a reinterpretation of Genesis considering modern geology before 1859, seemingly without fear of severe consequences. Thus, Michael Tuomey (1805-1857), in his account of the geology of South Carolina (1848), proposed harmonizing geology with Scripture by suggesting a long interval between the first creation and the later creation in Eden. Similarly, paleontologist and physician Robert W. Gibbes (1809-1866) assured members of the South Carolina Institute that the Bible's silence on the timing of the

original creation allowed Christians to accept that the earth had been home to animals and plants for countless ages before the creation of man (60). Moreover, Henry Clay White's (1848-1927) career at the College of Georgia shows how evolutionists could survive and sometimes even thrive in the intellectual climate of the South. White, a chemistry and geology professor, joined the faculty at Athens in 1872, where he openly taught Darwinism to his students. In the late 1870s or early 1880s, White, or perhaps one of his geology colleagues, commissioned a fresco depicting evolution for the geology lecture room. In 1909, White planned a special event to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Charles Darwin's birth, but because the college chancellor was concerned about possible criticism from evangelical opponents of evolution, White had to celebrate at his home, along with three college colleagues and Cleland Kinloch Nelson (1852-1917), an Episcopalian bishop (68). Theistic evolutionists also flourished at other public universities in the South, such as Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia (69), and at religiously affiliated universities, such as Presbyterian, Southern Baptist, Methodist, and Quaker colleges (70).

However, some Southern scientists were critical of Darwin, especially in the first fifteen years after the publication of *Origin of Species*. One of the most ardent scientific opponents of Darwinism in the South was John McCrady (1831-1881), who, after the Civil War, became a critic of what he saw as the erroneous views of evolution that he associated with Darwin (71). In 1873, Louis Agassiz (1807-1873) invited McCrady to join the faculty of Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology, but he was forced to resign in 1877, possibly because of his social and religious conservatism and inadequate teaching and research. McCrady returned to the South and spent his final years working on his research, but his reluctance to publish his views on evolution limited his influence on Southern thought (72).

Outside scientific circles, anti-Darwinian sentiment was more widespread, although some educated Southerners appreciated Darwin for refuting the rigid doctrine of the immutability of species. Even in Southern churches, voices were sometimes raised calling for tolerance, if not acceptance, of evolution. For example, a Presbyterian preacher suggested that scientists should be allowed to judge the hypothesis on its merits. He believed that if it were true, it would eventually be accepted as a scientific theory, regardless of religious opposition.

However, the situation worsened after World War I when fundamentalists, convinced that teaching human evolution was responsible for many of the nation's social problems, attempted to remove evolutionists from their academic positions and ban the teaching of evolution in public schools (73).

2.2 Creationism Before and After World War I

As soon as discussions about evolution came to public attention in the 1880s and 1890s, creationists became increasingly alarmed, especially by the scientific community's assertive demands to eliminate all traces of the supernatural from science, encouraging critics to speak out (Numbers 51). As news of Darwinism's supposed demise spread, some American opponents of evolution speculated that those who had abandoned their faith and accepted evolutionism too early would soon change their minds. However, most conservative Christians, particularly those who later embraced fundamentalism, saw higher criticism as the real threat to Christianity, not evolution, a position made clear in *The Fundamentals* (52).

The early 20th century saw an increase in the number of high school students, many of whom used biology textbooks that portrayed evolution in a positive light. This phenomenon familiarized a new generation of Americans with evolution, including the children of fundamentalist parents, which, according to historian Edward J. Larson (1953), led to a backlash due to their intolerance and insensitivity. By the end of the war, biological evolution had deeply permeated American academic institutions, with only a small proportion still adhering strictly to creationism (53). However, the situation was soon to change.

In early 1922, William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), a Presbyterian layman and three-time Democratic presidential candidate, learned of an initiative in Kentucky to ban the teaching of evolution in public schools. He was optimistic, predicting the movement would spread nationwide and drive Darwinism out of schools. Although he was overly hopeful, he was not wrong: by the end of the decade, more than twenty states had debated laws against evolution, and some even banned teaching evolution in public schools. Oklahoma, for example, restricted the use of evolution books, while Florida condemned the teaching of Darwinism as "inappropriate and subversive." Bryan significantly impacted all this, thanks in particular to his involvement in the Scopes trial, which will be discussed in the next section (55).

Bryan's views were not significantly different from those of the fundamentalists; on the contrary, he was almost amused by the idea of human evolution from apes. However, his opinion changed drastically after experiencing the war. His optimism about the future of Christianity was shaken, and Bryan put this down to Darwinism and its corruption of the human soul, but he was not alone. Indeed, after the war, many associated the threat to democracy and Christianity with Darwinism, which eventually contributed to German militarism. His concerns then turned to the impact of evolution on American youth.

In 1921, Bryan began a nationwide crusade against Darwinism, specifically emphasizing his skepticism of the evolutionary origin of the eye and favoring a literal interpretation of Genesis (57). Furthermore, in visits to college campuses and conversations with the Christian community, Bryan had come to believe that teaching evolution was causing students to lose faith in the Bible. This concern was reinforced by James H. Leuba's (1868-1946) *Belief in God and Immortality* (1916), which statistically demonstrated that college attendance was threatening traditional religious faith. In addition, the 1924 trial of Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb for murder confirmed the fears of Bryan and the fundamentalists, although critics pointed out the inconsistencies of such arguments (56).

Despite Bryan, who was often criticized for his lack of scientific understanding, having to defend himself against accusations of incompetence and occasionally flaunting his academic credentials, many joined his crusade (58). A 1929 survey of seven hundred Protestant clergy found that 89% of Lutherans, 63% of Baptists, and 62% of Evangelicals believed the world was created as described in Genesis (59). However, it is essential to point out that not all fundamentalists were creationists and that many creationists did not join the crusade against evolution, and the survey does not indicate the level of political participation in the anti-evolution campaign by denomination. Lutherans, for example, while opposing evolution, often favored education over legislation and viewed legal action as a dangerous blending of Church and State (60).

On the other hand, the Baptists and Presbyterians, who dominated the fundamentalist movement, were the most vocal opponents of evolution. Baptist preachers, in particular, were among the earliest and loudest critics, such as Thomas T. Martin (1862-1939), a former science teacher and itinerant preacher who vehemently opposed evolution because he saw it as a threat to youth and society. In *Hell and the High Schools* (1922), he attacked evolution and compared its teaching to the German poisoning of children during the war (61). With an apocalyptic and urgent tone, Martin wanted, above all, to incite parents against the school authorities and state legislators:

> Reader, if you are not a parent, do you not yearn intensely to turn my child, your neighbor's child, your enemy's child, from spending Eternity in hell? Were even your enemy's house on fire, would you stand by in indifference and let his child be burned alive? Yet that child's being burned alive is as nothing when compared to that child's spending eternity in hell. You would go to the limit in helping to rescue the child from the burning building. Isn't saving a soul from

> spending eternity in hell ten million times more important than saving a human body from a burning building? (Martin n.p.)

The leadership of the anti-evolution movement came not only from individuals but also from interdenominational organizations such as the World's Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA, 1919) (Numbers 63). Focused initially on premillennialism, she increasingly fought evolution in the early 1920s and endeavored to find suitable textbooks for Christian schools. They found unacceptable the proliferation of texts that focused on evolution, with the only mainstream biology text they approved being George A. Baitsell's (1885-1971) *Manual of Biological Forms* (1923), which abstained from evolutionary speculation (64).

However, although the anti-evolution movement enjoyed a revival in the first twenty years of the new century, its fortunes were soon to change.

2.2.1 The Scopes Trial

As high school attendance increased and scientific advances progressed, the debate between religion and faith intensified. By 1925, the possibility of reconciling traditional religion with evolution had diminished, so it became impossible to maintain a teleological view of evolution.

In the 1920s, state representative and World Christian Fundamentals Association leader John Washington Butler (1875-1952) pressured state legislatures to pass laws against evolution. His efforts succeeded with the passage of the Tennessee law (in his name) on March 25, 1925. Moreover, Tennessee Governor Austin Peay (1876-1927) signed the law only to gain the support of rural legislators, even if he believed it would neither be enforced nor disrupt instruction in Tennessee schools (Hankins 59). The Butler Act reads:

> AN ACT [capitalized in original] prohibiting the teaching of the Evolution Theory in all the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of Tennessee, which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, and to provide penalties for the violations thereof.
>
> Section 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Tennessee*, That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals.

> Section 2. *Be it further enacted*, That any teacher found guilty of the violation of this Act, Shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and upon conviction, shall be fined not less than One Hundred $ (100.00) Dollars nor more than Five Hundred ($ 500.00) Dollars for each offense.
> Section 3. *Be it further enacted*, That this Act take effect from and after its passage, the public welfare requiring it. (Tenn. HB 185)

Although Butler opposed the teaching of evolution in its entirety, it is interesting to see how this law did not prohibit the teaching of non-human evolution, the mechanisms of variation, and natural selection, nor did it address (or restrict) the teaching of the prevailing scientific theories about geology and the age of the earth. It also did not impose the teaching of Genesis. Still, it only expressly prohibited the teaching of the evolution of man or any other theory that denies that man was created by God, as stated in the Bible.

The reaction was not long in coming. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), which "dares to create a more perfect union – beyond one person, party, or side. Our mission is to realize this promise of the United States Constitution for all and expand the reach of its guarantees" (ACLU), staged a test case against the Butler Act, recruiting a scapegoat name through the newspaper. At the same time, George Rappleyea (1894-1966), a mining executive in Dayton (Tennessee), jumped at the opportunity, believing a lawsuit would boost tourism for the town. Together, they funded a test case, and the staging began (Hankins 60).

The Scopes Trial, often called the Scopes "Monkey" Trial for the evolutionist's idea of man's descent from apes, officially began on July 10, 1925, and lasted eight days, during which John Scopes, a high school science teacher and part-time football coach, was accused of teaching evolution. The case featured American best lawyers, with William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) for the prosecution and Clarence Darrow (1857-1938) for the defense, and, for the first time, the trial was broadcast on radio across the United States.

Bryan was particularly famous at the time, especially for his populist majoritarianism, which supported free will as the basis of democracy. However, his views on Darwinism were not so clear-cut. Bryan opposed Darwin's belief in the "survival of the fittest" and declared that humanity had evolved thanks to love and justice, not power and ruthlessness. He also viewed evolution as a threat to progressive reform as if taxpayers fund public schools, they should reflect the wishes of the people. Nevertheless, Bryan allied himself with the anti-evolutionists, which led to his volunteering to prosecute Scopes in 1925 (61-62).

On the other hand, Scopes' defense attorney, Clarence Darrow, was famous for his support of labor unions and his opposition to the death penalty. In particular, the year before,

he became famous for the Leopold and Loeb trial, in which he proved that the murderers were not inherently evil but a product of American society (62-63).

Despite all the seriousness of the roles, the trial was more similar to a play than a court case, with massive media coverage and a large crowd in attendance (even outside the court). Soon, Bryan and the prosecution proved that Scopes had violated Butler's Law, while Darrow tried to demonstrate the scientific validity of the theory of evolution, even calling expert witnesses. Moreover, Bryan poorly managed Darrow's investigation, unable to reconcile biblical inconsistencies with science. Eventually, as expected, the jury found Scopes guilty, with Bryan offering to pay the fine. Later, the American Civil Liberties Union appealed, but the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Butler Act and overturned Scopes' conviction on a technicality (the judge should have decided the fine, not the jury), preventing an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court (64).

One of the most famous moments of the trial occurred on the seventh day when Darrow called Bryan as a witness. As mentioned earlier, the questioning did not go as expected, mainly because Bryan's answers were too vague, and he preferred to hide behind the kind of "the Bible says this, and I believe what it says" reasoning rather than argue his ideas. His answers to scientific questions were fascinating:

> Q—Do you claim that everything in the Bible should be literally interpreted?
> A—I believe everything in the Bible should be accepted as it is given there; some of the Bible is given illustratively. For instance: "Ye are the salt of the earth." I would not insist that man was actually salt, or that he had flesh of salt, but it is used in the sense of salt as saving God's people.
> Q—But when you read that Jonah swallowed the whale—or that the whale swallowed Jonah—excuse me please—how do you literally interpret that?
> […]
> A— […] I believe in a God who can make a man and make both do what He pleases.
> […]
> Q—Do you believe Joshua made the sun stand still?
> A—I believe what the Bible says. I supposed you mean that the earth stood still?
> […]
> Q—Have you an opinion as to whether—whoever wrote the book, I believe it is, Joshua, the Book of Joshua, thought the sun went around the earth or not?
> […]

A—I believe that the Bible is inspired, an inspired author, whether one who wrote as he was directed to write understood the things he was writing about, I don't know.

Q—Whoever inspired it? Do you think whoever inspired it believed that the sun went around earth?

A—I believe it was inspired by the Almighty, and He may have used language that could be understood at that time. (Criminal Court of Tennessee 285-86)

From this excerpt, it seems as if Bryan was putting on an act or if the questions and the answers had been agreed on before the start of the trial. Darrow seems to play along with Bryan, inciting him with perfectly crafted questions and insinuations, often even making the audience laugh: an excellent performance if staged, or a worrying situation if not.

What happened after the Scopes Trial is important to understand the development of the creation discourse in America. Clearly, the trial neither ended nor slowed the anti-evolution movement, which peaked two years later. Although the prosecution exposed Bryan and fundamentalism to public ridicule and contributed to a negative, anti-science image of the South, it also encouraged publishers to minimize coverage of evolution in their textbooks (Numbers 89). Most importantly, the trial became a rich source of legend-making, especially about Bryan and Darrow, fundamentalism and modernism, and the relationship between science and religion. What the prosecution symbolizes is thus far more historically significant than what it achieved at the time (91).

Soon after the Scopes Trial, newspapers agreed that the real winners were the evolutionists, as they had succeeded in exposing the opposition's weaknesses and familiarizing the Tennessee youth with evolutionary theories. However, the idea of a defeat of the fundamentalists only gained ground in the early 1930s: while fundamentalism won in theory because the law stood, it lost as civilized opinion, ridiculed by the trial. This shift in public opinion led to the publication of countless articles and books, and later, the case became part of pop culture, influencing the production of several films. More recently, historians began to believe that Darrow's discrediting of Bryan finally spelled the end of the anti-evolution crusade and possibly the fundamentalist movement.

As might be expected, moreover, creationists invented their own legends about the Scopes Trial and its consequences. In 1929, for example, Harry Rimmer (1890-1952) ridiculed the defense's evolution expert, Horatio H. Newman (1885-1957), for allegedly claiming to have found evidence of a million-year-old man in Nebraska that turned out to be fossil teeth from an extinct pig. However, Newman never testified in court, and the Nebraska man was not

mentioned in his written statement. Instead, the story appears to originate from an exchange between paleontologist Henry Fairfield Osborn (1857-1935) and Bryan before the trial, in which Osborn mockingly suggested naming the ancient animal "Bryopithecus" after Bryan. Yet, Osborn later realized his mistake, which may have influenced his decision not to participate in the trial. Finally, in more recent years, some creationists have attempted to rehabilitate Bryan's image. Creationist biologist Bolton Davidheiser (1912-2007), for example, portrayed Bryan as a hero in his 1969 essay, claiming that despite Darrow's insinuations, Bryan showed a better understanding of evolution and the Bible than his critics. Today's creationists continue to respect Bryan, but surprisingly, they also sometimes praise Darrow's arguments against teaching only one theory of origins and see him as a proponent of a more balanced education, something more likely to come from creationists than ACLU advocates today (90).

2.3 Evangelicalism and Science: From Antievolution to Intelligent Design

After the Scopes trial, fundamentalists withdrew from mainstream culture and established their denominations, educational institutions, and publications. In particular, they abandoned their efforts to ban evolution from schools and instead focused on indoctrinating their communities with alternatives to evolutionary science (Hankins 69).

Historians such as Numbers believe that the rise of anti-evolutionist sentiment in the late 20th century was theological rather than social. Indeed, many believers were attracted to Creation Science because it prioritized the Bible over science, emphasized the literalness and historical accuracy of the biblical stories, and linked the creation story in Genesis to the end-time prophecies in Revelation–a recurring element in denominations such as the Independent Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans, and Seventh-day Adventists, though it is interpreted differently in each of them (Numbers, *Darwinism Comes to America* 6-7).

2.3.1 The Rise of Creation Science

By the second quarter of the twentieth century, creationist views were mainly divided among three theories: day-age theory, gap theory, and flood geology.

The day-age theory, which has been around since at least the late 19th century and was supported by William Jennings Bryan during the Scopes Trial, interprets the "days" of Genesis as long periods or epochs rather than 24-hour days. This view allows for an ancient earth and the possibility that evolution could be a part of God's creation process. However, after the

Scopes Trial, most evangelicals, if they accepted evolution, still rejected the idea that humans evolved from a lower species.

On the other hand, the gap theory attempts to preserve a literal interpretation of the six-day creation in Genesis by proposing a long pause between Genesis 1:1-2 and the rest of the creation account. This gap is used to reconcile the apparent age of geological formations with the belief in a relatively recent creation of man. This theory was popularized by Bishop Ussher's chronology, which placed the creation date at around 4004 BC. While some theorists assumed that life existed before this gap, they claimed that the emergence of life as we know it today was more recent, limiting the extent of evolution. The gap theory gained popularity through the Scofield Reference Bible, and Harry Rimmer was one of the leading creationist proponents of this theory after the Scopes trial (Hankins 69).

Finally, flood geology, which later replaced the day-age and gap theories, is closely associated with the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. The movement originated in the 19th century with William Miller's (1782-1849) failed prediction of Christ's return and was later revived by Ellen White (1827-1915), who emphasized a literal interpretation of the seven-day creation and rejected the day-time theory as undermining the Sabbath. One of the most famous proponents of this theory was George McCready Price (1870-1963), a Canadian who joined the Seventh-day Adventists and was deeply influenced by White's writings (70). Despite Price having limited formal scientific training, he devoted his career to challenging evolution by advocating flood geology. In particular, he became known for his efforts to disprove evolution by emphasizing the geological evidence for a global flood found in the sequence of fossils: lower life forms were buried first during the Flood, while higher forms escaped to higher ground. After the Flood receded, Price proposed a miraculous cosmic storm that buried the remains of animals and humans that remained on the surface. Price set out his ideas in his first book, *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science* (1902), followed by *Illogical Geology: The Weakest Point in the Evolution Theory* (1906) (71). By the mid-1930s, Price was a prominent creationist within fundamentalism, although efforts to unite the various creationist factions often foundered on disagreements between flood geologists, day agers, and gap theorists. However, despite the internal disputes, creationism and anti-evolutionism remained central beliefs for many fundamentalists.

In 1941, a group of moderate fundamentalists founded the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) to create a space in which the pros and cons of evolution could be discussed, and the views of flood geologists and gap theorists could be criticized (72). Many ASA members wanted to return to a non-confrontational approach to science that had characterized

evangelicals before the rise of fundamentalism, rejecting the "Bible-only" stance that mainstream science refused. Instead, they sought to revive the older evangelical tradition of integrating scientific and scriptural understanding, as figures like Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) exemplified. However, the experts' efforts to reconcile evangelical biblical interpretation with mainstream science soon faced resistance from conservative factions, leading to divisions within the ASA, similar to the broader split between fundamentalists and neo-evangelicals. The backlash from fundamentalists against the ASA's approach allowed flood geology to gain further traction under "Creation Science" (73), with John Whitcomb Jr. and Henry Morris playing a decisive role in this change. Whitcomb, who had studied history at Princeton and theology at Grace Theological Seminary, worked with Morris, who had a doctorate in hydraulics from the College of Minnesota. Morris, originally a member of the ASA, tried to move the organization toward a more flood geology-oriented stance (74).

In 1961, John C. Whitcomb (1924-2020) and Henry M. Morris (1918-2006) published the book *The Genesis Flood*, in which they reintroduced and updated the concepts of flood geology. Although they minimized the references to Price and renamed the movement "Creation Science," their arguments were similar to Price's. They claimed that the geologic strata and species artifacts were created by a global Flood rather than by slow evolutionary processes. However, the book initially had a minor impact on evangelicalism, as many considered the question of the origin of man to be marginal (Huskinson 43).

Morris recognized the limitations of these isolated efforts and attempted to form new organizations to combat evolutionary theory without internal theological conflict (44). Consequently, Walter E. Lammerts (1904-1996), Henry M. Morris, and Duane Gish (1921-2013), along with Nell and Kelly Segraves, founded the Creation Research Society (CRS) in 1963 to promote research within the creation science community. In contrast to earlier attempts to challenge evolution through legal action, the CRS focused on creating a space for like-minded people and required its members to adhere to a literal interpretation of the Bible. (45) The CRS quickly gained a good reputation, but the situation changed in 1968 when the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Epperson v. Arkansas* that laws prohibiting the teaching of evolution were unconstitutional, marking a legal defeat for creationism. Moreover, internal conflict soon arose between Morris and the Segraves family: while Morris favored a gradual, education-based approach to creationism, Nell and Kelly Segraves favored rapid political action and rushed to publish creationist textbooks for primary schools (46-47). Tensions

climaxed in 1972 when the Segraveses deposed Morris with the board's support and severed ties with the college and the church.

After the split, Morris quickly reorganized his remaining staff and founded the Institute for Creation Research (ICR). He focused on education within evangelicalism and advocated for Creation Science to be taught alongside evolution in public schools to protect Christian students rather than proselytize others. The ICR actively engaged its target audience by offering public debates, radio programs, lecture series, and materials tailored to evangelicals (48). By 1981, the organization was so successful that it began offering state-approved degree programs in biology, geology, astro/geophysics, and science education to train teachers in creation science. However, the ICR graduate school faced significant challenges as it struggled to balance presenting itself as a defender of evangelical orthodoxy and downplaying the religious aspects of Creation Science to government certifying agencies. Eventually, this tension led to the school's license being revoked in 1990, but, two years later, it was reinstated on the condition that evolution would be taught alongside Creation Science. When the agreement expired in 1995, the school operated under a religious exemption until it moved to Texas in 2007 (49).

When *The Genesis Flood* was published in 1961, it was well-received in fundamentalist circles nationwide. However, it took years for the concept of flood geology to be widely accepted in the broader evangelical community, while, outside of these circles, the book was primarily ignored as mainstream scientists at the time took advantage of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA, 1958) and introduced new biology textbooks that emphasized evolutionary theory (56). More than twenty years after Morris and Whitcomb's book, however, an official organization was formed to counter the book's influence on the scientific community. In 1983, the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) was founded to advocate for teaching evolution and protect science classrooms from Creation Science. The following year, the National Academy of Sciences (NAS, 1863) issued a statement condemning modern creationism as unscientific, arguing that creationism, with its supernatural explanations for the origin of life and its reliance on authority and revelation rather than evidence, could not be considered science (58). They also warned that including such teachings in science education could undermine critical thinking and hinder the progress of science and technology (59).

Eventually, even evangelicals criticized Creation Science as evangelical scientists distanced themselves from the movement, and the New Religious Right shifted its focus to other issues such as abortion, prayer in public schools, and support for President Reagan's re-election (60-61). As a result, the movement's prominence started vanishing in the mid-1980s,

leading to varying levels of support in the 1990s and becoming a local experience for its adherents that coexisted with the emerging Intelligent Design (ID) movement (66).

2.3.2 A New Creation Theory: Intelligent Design (ID)

Intelligent Design attracted attention for its bold attempt to challenge the foundations of science by claiming to have found irrefutable evidence for a god-like being, although it asserted that it was not a religious concept but a scientific theory based on evidence about the origins of life and opposed to strictly materialist views of evolution. While the idea of design has deep historical roots, its modern version officially began in 1984, when three Protestant scientists – chemist Charles B. Thaxton (1939), mechanical engineer Walter L. Bradley (1943), and geochemist Roger L. Olsen (1950) – published the book *The Mystery of Life's Origin: Reassessing Current Theories*, in which they attributed the complexity of life to a divine creator (Numbers, *The Creationists* 373). The most notable aspect of their book was the foreword by Dean H. Kenyon (1939), a creationist biology professor at San Francisco State College, in which both Kenyon and the authors identified a "fundamental flaw" in current theories of the origin of life, concluding that the undirected flow of energy in the primordial environment was an inadequate and probably incorrect explanation for the complexity of living systems (374). In 1989, the Foundation for Thought and Ethics, a Texas organization dedicated to promoting the gospel and defending Judeo-Christian morality, published *Of Pandas and People: The Central Question of Biological Origins*, the first book to make an explicit case for ID. Written by Kenyon and Percival Davis, a young earth creationist and former professor at Hillsborough Community College, the book was intended to supplement standard high school biology textbooks (375). Kenyon and Davis originally conceived their book as a scientific defense of creationism, but after the Supreme Court ruled against creation science, they revised the manuscript, replacing terms like "creation" and "creationists" with "intelligent design" and "design proponents" and changing the title of the book from *Biology and Creation* to *Of Pandas and People*. The book presented six case studies comparing Darwinian evolution and intelligent design. It consistently favored the latter, defined as an explanation that attributes the origin of new organisms to an immaterial cause created by an intelligent agent.

In 1991, the Intelligent Design movement gained prominence when Phillip E. Johnson (1940-2019), a law professor at the College of California, published *Darwin on Trial*. After a mid-life spiritual renewal, Johnson, a Presbyterian lawyer, came across Richard Dawkins' (1946) *The Blind Watchmaker* (1986) and concluded that the argument for evolution was based

more on rhetoric than evidence. In his book, Johnson attempted to expose the weaknesses of Darwinism by critically analyzing the proof of the concept of the "blind watchmaker," while his main critique centered on the scientific assumption that naturalism was the only legitimate framework, which he believed unfairly ruled out theistic explanations (376). Despite his success, Johnson and his followers were criticized, especially by scientific creationists, theistic evolutionists, and naturalistic evolutionists. While some young-earth creationists applauded his efforts to find evidence for God in nature, leading proponents of creation science were less enthusiastic about ID's tendency to downplay biblical issues in favor of a united front against Darwinism. In particular, young-earth creationists criticized ID for its disregard of literal biblical interpretations, such as the young earth and the global Flood. Morris, for example, appreciated ID's rejection of Darwinism but was concerned about its lack of theological focus. He feared that Christians might use ID to avoid engaging with the biblical account of creation and reject the idea that the "intelligent designer" could be someone other than God (377). Moreover, even the proponents of ID disagreed about what their theory represented. For example, the authors of *Of Pandas and People* insisted that ID made no specific claims about Christian fundamentalist beliefs such as a young earth, a global flood, or even the Christian God, and they wanted to distance themselves from traditional creationist ideas and avoid discussions of Genesis or biblical creation – although some conceded that the reference to an 'intelligent designer' was essentially a 'politically correct' way of implying God (379).

In the mid-1990s, ID proponents won significant political victories and introduced the "intelligent designer" concept in schools. In 1999 and 2005, the Kansas State Board of Education voted to remove the teaching of evolution, the Big Bang theory, and geologic ages from the state's science standards and to change the definition of science to include the possibility of supernatural explanations (387-388). Then, the Ohio Board of Education approved a lesson plan titled "Critical Analysis of Evolution" that would teach students about the controversy surrounding evolution – a debate that is more about politics than science. Finally, in 2001, the ID movement arrived in Washington, D.C., proposing an amendment to the No Child Left Behind Act to help students distinguish between scientific theories and philosophical or religious claims and, when teaching evolution, to address the controversy involved and prepare students for public discourse on the topic.

In 2005, however, the case of *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* presented the first major legal challenge to ID when the Dover (Pennsylvania) Area School District Board of Education decided to alert students to the gaps/problems in Darwin's theory and other theories of evolution, including but not limited to ID (391). The trial began in federal court in Harrisburg

on September 26, 2005. Reminiscing on the creation of science litigation in the 1980s, it centered on whether endorsing the ID theory outlined in *Of Pandas and People* constituted religious doctrine violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment (392). On December 20, 2005, Judge Jones ruled that intelligent design is not science because it has a supernatural cause and does not adhere to the scientific principle of verifiable, natural explanations and that the promotion of ID violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which mandates the separation of church and state. In his ruling, he concluded that teaching ID as an alternative to evolution in public school science classes was unconstitutional and ordered the school board to pay the plaintiffs' legal fees, estimated at one million dollars. The public reaction was predictable. The scientific community celebrated the decision, and the Discovery Institute, a think tank of ID experts, denounced him as an activist federal judge who wanted to suppress criticism of Darwinian evolution (394).

Nevertheless, the ID movement was remarkably successful in convincing the public and the media that there was a serious scientific debate about Darwinism (396). In the early 2000s, the headlines of the most prominent newspapers worldwide expressed their concerns and questioned the validity of Darwinian theory or ID. Eventually, this debate gained much attention for the movement and even landed in the 2004 presidential campaign when both George W. Bush and John F. Kerry were asked whether ID or other critiques of evolutionary theory should be taught in public schools (397).

Assessing the true popularity of ID is complicated: while some adherents appreciate the focus on divine design but are less concerned with the movement's radical claims, many find it challenging to distinguish ID from biblical or scientific creationism. Moreover, it is unclear to what extent ID's appeal is international or limited to American evangelicalism. Some evidence suggests that ID is spreading beyond the United States, such as the founding of the International Society for Complexity, Information, and Design (ISCID) and the emergence of Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness (IDEA) clubs in Asia and Africa. However, other signs, such as the 2005 condemnation of creationism and ID as "pseudoscience" by the International Council for Science, seem to point in a different direction. Despite ongoing confusion between ID and Creation Science, the Discovery Institute's design theorists have undeniably captured global attention (398).

CHAPTER 3
TELEVANGELISM:
BROADCASTING GOD'S MESSAGE

3.1 Evangelicalism and Mass Media

Televangelism or the Gospel spread through television can be seen as an evolution of evangelicalism's effort to use communication technologies. Evangelicals were indeed pioneers in mass communication, from Whitefield's open-air sermons in the 18th century and Finney's extensive use of newspapers in the 19th century to Aimee Semple McPherson's (1890-1944) and Charles E. Fuller's (1887-1968) radio programs in the early 20th century. After the introduction of television and its spread in American homes, evangelicals expanded their historical tradition and used this new broadcasting media to reach a wider audience (Balmer 677).

Since its early beginning, television programming has always seen religion as a gold mine, with influential broadcasters working primarily with respected and established religious groups such as the National Council of Catholic Men[1] (NCCM, 1920), the Jewish Theological Seminary of America[2] (JTS, 1886), and the National Council of Churches[3] (NCC, 1950) (Horsfield 3). However, their collaboration was only sometimes balanced: while the broadcasters produced religious programs by providing production facilities, technical services, and budgetary resources, they maintained control over content to avoid controversy. This benefited both parties: the broadcasters complied with Federal Communications Commission (FCC, 1934) requirements, and the established religious groups received free airtime and technical resources. Criticism arose, however, especially from religious leaders who were skeptical of reducing the Christian message to general truths, which would ultimately undermine its essence (Horsfield 4-5). Nevertheless, many denominations agreed to the terms of the networks and made the most of the benefits on offer.

The 1950s were undoubtedly the culmination of network religious programming, with many long-running and eventually award-winning programs such as Columbia Broadcasting

[1] A national organization established to develop and support the growth of the lay apostolate and Catholic Action (Encyclopedia.com).
[2] A Jewish educational group focusing on training rabbis in modern research (Britannica).
[3] The largest ecumenic body in America aimed to offer a platform for member churches to share their shared beliefs and work together on different initiatives (Britannica).

System (CBS, 1927) Television's "Lamp Unto My Feet"[4] (1948-1979) and "Look Up and Live" [5] (1954-1979) (5). Soon, however, larger denominations turned to alternative broadcasting methods. At the same time, fundamentalists and evangelicals, lacking the resources and prestige to win free airtime, primarily relied on viewer support to buy commercial airtime. In the 1960s and 1970s, these independent, audience-supported evangelists dominated the religious airwaves, earning the nickname "electronic church" (6).

During this first phase, no other religious program achieved such sustained commercial sponsorship or consistently high ratings as Roman Catholic Bishop Fulton J. Sheen's (1895-1979) program "Life Is Worth Living" (DuMont 1952-1955; ABC 1955-1957) (7). "Life is Worth Living" was ecumenical and covered various topics, from communism to art, science, war, family life, and personal issues. Sheen was academically trained, had a solid philosophical background, and could captivate and effectively communicate with a diverse audience across faiths, although he was Catholic. This was evident when Sheen received a standing ovation at the 1977 National Religious Broadcasters Convention, symbolizing the shared themes between Catholics and conservative Protestant broadcasters (8). His success provided a model later adopted by conservative broadcasters to bridge theological differences between evangelical and fundamentalist Protestants.

In the 1960s, the structure of religious television began to change considerably. Initially, there were four types of religious programming: network sustaining-time programs produced by networks in cooperation with the associations mentioned above; syndicated sustaining-time programs produced by individual denominations and syndicated nationally; local programs; and paid-time, audience-supported syndicated programs supported by viewers and airing in airtime purchased by individual local stations (6). Soon, however, there was a noticeable decline in programs airing in "sustaining time," accompanied by a marked increase in the number and volume of independently syndicated evangelical programs purchasing airtime. In addition, as the decade progressed, independent evangelical organizations began to buy and build their television stations and develop their programming networks (9), while changes in the television industry in the 1970s increased the influence of evangelicals on the medium, and the FCC began to allow paid religious broadcasts (Balmer 678). Evangelists seized this opportunity, realizing they could generate donations far exceeding the affordable Sunday morning airtime cost, leading to a significant shift in religious programming.

[4] This program delves into the history and philosophy of Protestant, Christian, and Jewish faiths and draws its title from the revered Psalm 119 (IMDb).
[5] A non-denominational religious program that discussed various topics from different (IMDb).

Previously dominated by the solemn liturgies of Roman Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, religious programs now adopted the evangelical tradition of combining religion with entertainment. The "electronic church" manifested itself in various forms, including the Pentecostal and healing services of Oral Roberts (1918-2009), the prosperity gospel of Rex Humbard (1919-2007), the dramatic performances of Jimmy Swaggart (1935), the conservative political messages of Jerry Falwell, and the talk show formats of Pat Robertson modeled on Johnny Carson's (1925-2005) "Tonight Show" (NBC, 1953). Soon, televangelism became very profitable, and many televangelists generated millions of dollars annually, exceeding the budgets of entire denominations. For example, Robertson's ability to attract large audiences and his financial acumen turned the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) into a powerful enterprise, laying the basis of his campaign for the 1988 Republican presidential nomination (678).

Understanding why this change happened cannot be understood without considering empirical factors (Horsfield 15). According to Dean R. Hoge (1937-2008) and David A. Roozen, co-authors of *Understanding Church Growth and Decline, 1950-78* (1979), mainline churches did not continue to grow – at least, as conservative churches did – because of contextual factors, such as a cultural shift towards diversity in society which caused a separation from traditional social institutions. Moreover, many people desired strong leadership and straightforward guidance to help them cope with the rapid social and religious issues they faced. Consequently, numerous parishioners, including certain disenchanted ex-members of traditional churches, found reassurance within the evangelical churches, which, contrary to mainline churches, have faced minimal setbacks due to evolving circumstances. Their image of assurance, clear theology, self-discipline, unique lifestyle and morality, and strong organizational structure offered a stable social option for those struggling with societal changes (16). While, at the same time, evangelical broadcasting played a crucial role in increasing the movement's exposure, providing evangelicals with connection to and exposure of their national leaders and celebrities, a feeling of belonging to a larger evangelical community, and support for their dedication. As a result, evangelicalism started moving from the outskirts of American society to the religious mainstream, and the television industry became more focused on this group, choosing to highlight actions rather than known truths.

The second crucial element contributing to the growth of evangelical television programs was the development of technology, particularly computers. The increasing sophistication of computers enabled religious broadcasters to cope with the large volume of correspondence generated by their broadcasts, a crucial concern for paid broadcasters who

depended on a continuous audience response for their income (17). Indeed, computers enabled not only the computation of responses but also the development of an extended, almost personal relationship between broadcasters and viewers, similar to the relationship between a pastor and his congregation. This technology facilitated mass counseling on individual problems and allowed broadcasters to target financial appeals based on stored personal data. Furthermore, evangelicals took a utilitarian stance towards technology. They focused on the morality of the user and its purpose rather than discussing computer technology's social and ethical implications as mainstream churches did. This pragmatic approach enabled evangelicals to use technology effectively for their purposes.

Another key factor contributing to the growth of paid television channels was their ability and willingness to adapt their message to the demands of television (18). Television presents a consistent mythic system in its programming that simplifies and sensationalizes events and issues, promises instant gratification, and provides recurring images of power, happiness, and success. In this sense, evangelical theology fits well with television's approach: it emphasizes the individual as the effective social unit, simplifies concepts and events, and stresses faith's experiential and emotional aspects. This makes evangelical programs more appealing and attractive to viewers than other Christian traditions' mystical or conceptual expressions. Evangelicals' dynamic evangelization work, emphasis on dramatic change, and affirmation of traditional American values fit with television's tendencies toward sensationalism and consumerism. Paid television networks popularized evangelicalism by portraying it in terms familiar to most Americans – those of television. While some mainstream and evangelical leaders criticized this interpretation of Christianity, the paid television networks recognized that television had become the "real world" for millions of people and that the Christian faith needed to be communicated in understandable terms (19).

As a result, mainstream groups began to lose the support they had received through their contracts with broadcasters, needing to search for a new space for their religious programming. Moreover, by 1977, even the National Council of Churches changed its long-standing policy against buying airtime for religious programs (Hoover 56).

By the mid-1980s, however, televangelist hegemony was deeply shattered by scandals that began to tarnish the reputations of several televangelists and led to a significant overall decline in ratings and revenues for televangelists (Balmer 678), such as Jim O. Bakker's (1940) "The PTL Club" (1974-1989), which was discredited by two scandals involving its founder and host: fraud and sexual assault (McKinney). Many major televangelist organizations scaled

back their activities, but the rise of cable television opened new opportunities for new televangelists and networks (Balmer 678).

3.1.1 The Audience: Who and Why?

Audience scores are the most crucial measure of success in the broadcasting world, and religious broadcasters with paid airtime are no exception. Although actual viewership was lower than generally believed, the large amount of media attention religious broadcasters received during the 1980 election was fueled by the widespread belief that they could win over a significant portion of the American television audience (Horsfield 101), fueling the "success equals God's blessing" mentality. Many past and present religious programs have a production quality comparable to general television programs, and some have won significant awards (102).

However, while evangelists view television as a God-given means of spreading their message worldwide, studies of religious television programs have shown that the real audience for most of these programs is highly fragmented, with viewers tuning in for precise reasons. Most demographic information about the core audience of religious television programs comes from surveys conducted by the Nielsen Corporation, supplemented by various other studies that provide a comprehensive picture of this audience. The demographic characteristics selected for these surveys are gender, age, education, employment history, geographic patterns, and church affiliation (111).

Concerning gender, Nielsen data from November 1979 show that the average number of female viewers per household for all syndicated religious programs was 0.74, compared to 0.42 for men. This trend is consistent with other studies, such as Dennis's (1962) study in Detroit and Robinson's (1964) study in seven cities, which found that women were more likely to consume religious radio and television programs than men. Similarly, Buddenbaum (1979) found that women were twice as likely as men to watch religious television programs regularly (112).

Age is the second key factor differentiating viewers from non-viewers of religious television programs, with older people more likely to watch these programs. For example, Dennis found that, although age does not always correlate directly with increased listening or viewing participation, the consumption of religious programs increases significantly after age 60. Similarly, Robinson's study showed that the percentage of irregular listeners and viewers decreased with age, with half of those over 60 regularly tuning in to religious programs. On the

other hand, Buddenbaum found that frequent viewers were most likely to be over 62, while those under 34 were likelier never to watch religious programs. Remarkably, among younger viewers, the majority never engaged with these programs, with 67.2% of teenagers and 70.3% of young adults being non-viewers (compared to only 25.7% of older adults). This age-dependent viewing behavior is consistent with general television viewing habits as, for example, in 1976, women over 50 watched an average of 35.0 hours of television per week, more than men over 50 (31.9 hours) and women aged between 18 and 49 (31.5 hours) (113).

Moreover, people with lower incomes and education ("blue-collars") watch significantly more religious programming than people with higher incomes and education ("white-collars"), and several studies of religious programming have highlighted this difference. Dennis, for example, found no significant difference in viewership of religious programs up to the high school level in 1962. After high school, however, the likelihood of listening to or watching religious programs declined sharply. On the other hand, Robinson's study found that people with the lowest level of formal education were much more likely to watch or listen to religious programs regularly. Finally, Buddenbaum's research found that the core audience for these programs consisted mainly of blue-collar workers, housewives, and unclassifiable professionals. Only 5.3% of working professionals reported watching religious programs regularly, compared to 30.4% of blue-collar workers and 25.3% of housewives and unclassifiable professionals. On the other hand, among retired people, 40.4% watched religious programs regularly, a much higher proportion than those who never or occasionally watched television (114).

Geographic patterns can also be observed among viewers and non-viewers of religious television programs. The Nielsen Audio data, as presented by Jeffrey K. Hadden (1937-2003) and Charles E. Swann in *Prime-Time Preachers* (1981), show in the most detail an apparent concentration in the Southern and Midwestern states, the regions with the highest church participation in the country. Dennis found in 1962 that being born in a southern state was important in distinguishing between viewers and non-viewers of religious programs (115).

Finally, religious television programs consistently attract different audiences based on their religious affiliation and interest, as one may expect. For example, Robinson's research demonstrates that Protestants watch religious programs more than Catholics or Jews, while Dennis pointed out that Pietistic Protestants tended to watch religious programs more than General Protestants and Reformed Protestants, possibly due to factors like occupation, education, and income. The data were confirmed by the fact that most religious programs were

Protestant or, if not, shared important topics and beliefs with this community, as Sheen's "Life Is Worth Living" demonstrated (116).

However, while solid religious devotion has always influenced the ratings of religious television programs, the success of religious programming has become increasingly skewed toward evangelicals, as evangelical programs have come to dominate religious programming (117). This was evidenced by the 1978 Gallup Poll on Evangelical Christianity, which found that those who watch religious television were more likely to have had a conversion experience, believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, believe in a personal devil, read the Bible frequently, discuss their faith with others, attend church services regularly, and adhere to practices typical of evangelicals. The poll also showed that the typical US evangelical – a white woman from the southern states aged 50 or older, with a high school diploma and modest income – has the same characteristics as the average religious TV viewer (118).

Moreover, not all evangelicals watched (and watch) religious television; in fact, the majority did not. The 1978 Gallup Poll found that, across three evangelical subgroups, 45% to 47% of respondents either did not watch religious programs or were unsure how much time they spent watching them, and another 5% to 9% watched less than an hour per week. Given these findings and the actual viewership figures for religious broadcasting, it appears that paid religious broadcasting represents a small subculture within the broader evangelical movement rather than a significant force with widespread influence on all evangelicals (117). But why?

Religious broadcasters tend to attract and shape their audiences based on their program content, formats, and marketing strategies, which means that many broadcasters are shifting their focus away from their original evangelistic goals and offering personal inspiration, guidance, and support (119). One of the most comprehensive studies of why people watch religious television programs was conducted by Frank and Greenberg in 1978. Their research found that different populations watch religious programs for vastly several reasons. They emphasized the multiple motivations behind television viewing, such as passive activities that provide tangible rewards (support, contact, and reinforcement of traditional American values), social integration (despite reduced interpersonal contact), family ties and understanding of others, a desire to stay informed and engaged with the world around them, and intellectual stimulation. Interestingly, not all groups with high viewership of religious programs exhibited a strong general interest in religion. This observation suggests religious broadcasters could enhance their effectiveness by identifying and addressing their audiences' specific characteristics and needs rather than relying on a uniform approach. By adopting more targeted and nuanced programming strategies, broadcasters can better align their efforts with the

broader ministry goals of the church, thereby avoiding a universal impact model that may not resonate equally with all viewers (124).

3.2 Cornerstone Television Network (CTN)

Cornerstone Television Network is a Christian media ministry dedicated to spreading the Gospel in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, nationwide, and beyond. Cornerstone TV is known for its creativity and innovation and became known as the producer of the first Christian soap opera, "His Place" (1989-2004). In addition to television programming, Cornerstone offers a 24-hour prayer hotline and operates Cornerstone Cares, an outreach that addresses specific needs (children and orphan care, evangelism, families, education, church planting, and disaster relief) locally, nationally, and internationally (Cornerstone Television Network, "Home Page").

3.2.1 History and Mission

The origins of Cornerstone Television date back to the late 1970s and a vision attributed to divine inspiration. During a chance visit to the headquarters of the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN, 1961), Norma Bixler reportedly received a clear direction from God to start a Christian television station in Pittsburgh. This vision, after a time of reflection and revelation, was eventually supported by her husband, Russell Bixler (1927-2000). Despite numerous financial, legal, personal, and logistical challenges, the couple persevered for a decade and, with the help of Pat Roberson and "divine intervention," overcame these obstacles and brought the planned station to fruition. The first broadcast aired on April 15, 1979, Easter Sunday (a detail that further underscored the "divine purpose of the program"). In the decades that followed, Cornerstone Television has played a significant role in spreading religious messages across the United States and beyond, reaching people personally.

Cornerstone Network has maintained its foundational legacy, rooted in a vision beyond Russell and Norma Bixler's original efforts. Under the direction of its leadership and staff, Cornerstone has consistently delivered quality Christian programming, such as shows like "Origins," "Light Music," "Sister 2 Sister," "Dashing Dish," and "Hope Today."

The Network is also directly supported by private donations. In fact, it is possible to make monthly and one-time donations ($25, $50, $84, or $150) from the U.S. or other countries. Their webpage states:

Change lives together with Cornerstone Network! [bold in original]

You will make a big impact in partnership with Cornerstone Network! Over the past year, you helped us to spread the Gospel through Christian television, and answer over 60,000 prayer calls ... And we were blessed with amazing expansion and growth in several areas — including the addition of our new Fire TV app, the growth of our Youtube page to 71,000+ subscribers and over 1.8 million views, and so much more! **Here's how you'll continue to help transform our region and the world through your generous donation today:** [bold in original]

- You'll share the message of salvation with the lost.
- You'll build up believers in the faith through the best possible programming that informs, entertains, and edifies.
- You'll educate and inspire with great Bible teaching.
- You'll touch lives through Cornerstone Cares, our humanitarian ministry.

Donation is linked to supporting a divine project and evangelization of society.

3.3 *Origins*: "We know what the Bible says is true, and the proof is all around you"

Launched in 1985 by Russell Bixler, the television program "Origins" provides a platform to explore scientific evidence that supports the "truth" of creation. It features in-depth discussions with experts and authors covering diverse topics, such as genetics, dinosaurs, Noah's Flood, the biblical age of the earth, and more. The program emphasizes the importance of understanding how the evidence fits together to strengthen faith in the Genesis narrative.

Despite its success, Blixter's death in January 2000 led to the program's discontinuation. The Bixler family eventually decided to continue the program and founded the Origins Fund, reviving it in 2004 with Dr. Donn S. Chapman, a senior pastor at Cornerstone Ministries, as host, whom Dr. Ray Heiple Jr., a senior pastor of Providence Presbyterian Church in Robinson Township (Pennsylvania), later replaced (Cornerstone Television Network, "Origins").

To date, "Origins" has uploaded most of the episodes on YouTube, but given the extensive number of episodes, only a few with shared themes will be analyzed for this research[6].

3.3.1 Dinosaurs: Bible Truth or Publicity Gimmick?

[6] The original airing dates are not available on YouTube, but it is possible to periodize episodes comparing them.

Dinosaurs have always been a children's favorite and the source of many debates, especially for young-earth creationists, a current of thought introduced in Chapter 2. The standard narrative favored by evolutionists in mainstream media is that they ruled the earth for around 140 million years and became extinct 65 million years ago. However, is it possible for creationists to reconcile their biblical worldview with the existence of these creatures? Over the years, many scholars tried to answer this question, often presenting their findings to the general audience through radio and television programs like "Origins."

The most comprehensive video documentary created by "Origins" on dinosaurs in the biblical narrative is "Dinosaurs!" hosted by Donn Chapman and first uploaded on YouTube in 2016. In it, Dr. Terry Mortenson of Answers in Genesis talks about dinosaurs and their connection to the Bible ("Dinosaurs!" 00:02:03-00:02:14).

According to Mortenson, despite the term not appearing in Genesis, the Bible supports the idea that dinosaurs were created on the sixth day of creation along with other land animals (00:06:31-00:06:48) and, initially, when they lived with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, they posed no threat to humans, but, as described in Genesis 1:29-30, they were vegetarians, and their sharp teeth, as found in some bats, do not necessarily indicate a carnivorous diet (00:06:53-00:08:41). Critics are skeptical about the absence of the term "dinosaur" in the Bible, but, argues Mortenson, this is because the word was not coined until 1841 by Sir Richard Owen (1804-1892) and, more importantly, the term is not used in modern translation of the Bible because of the theory of evolution, which does not recognize dinosaurs alongside humans. Despite this skepticism, the Bible features creatures similar to dinosaurs, like the "tannin," a term often translated as "dragon," especially in the older versions, such as the King James Bible. Historical and mythological accounts, such as the Chinese and Welsh traditions, seem to confirm this common belief in the existence of dragon-like creatures. Moreover, in Job 40, one of the Bible's oldest books, a creature called Behemoth is described, which many scientists believe could be a dinosaur or a similar giant reptile. Behemoth, created alongside humans, was a powerful, grass-eating animal with bones like bronze and limbs like iron. While some biblical studies suggest Behemoth could be a hippopotamus or an elephant, these animals do not fully correspond to the description. Fossil records show that dinosaurs like *Brontosaurus* or *Apatosaurus* had large tails, almost the same as Behemoth (00:09:42-00:15:01). However, despite God instructing Noah to build the Ark and gather two of every animal, including reptiles, many of them, the oldest and the largest particularly, perished during the Flood, with their remains preserved in fossils (00:17:10-00:23:29).

In the video documentary "Dinosaur Challenges Explained" (2016), Donn Chapman and Michael Oard, a retired U.S. National Weather Service meteorologist (Answer in Genesis), discuss what happened to dinosaurs during Noah's Flood. According to Oard, despite some skepticism among creationist scientists, dinosaur remains are found in early Flood deposits, indicating their activity during the Flood's initial stages. Dinosaur bones and tracks embedded in Flood sediments, in particular, suggest their presence during the catastrophe ("Dinosaur Challenges Explained," 00:07:04-00:13:40). Oard's theory, using the Briefly Exposed Diluvial Sediments (BEDS) method, proposes that the Flood's waves briefly exposed sediment layers, allowing dinosaurs to leave tracks and lay eggs, and scavenge before being buried again. This cycle probably occurred various times, especially between the 40th and 120th day of the Flood, explaining the presence of multiple layers of tracks, eggs, and bones. These features, found worldwide, support the theory of a global Flood as described in Genesis, confirming the Bible's authority (00:17:16-00:24:00). However, one question remains: did humans and animals coexist?

Dr. Brad Harrub, co-founder of *Focus Press*, interviewed in "Dinosaurs!" (2016), argues against the evolutionist claim that humans never saw living dinosaurs, suggesting that this narrative is aimed at piquing the interest of younger people and turning them away from creationism ("Dinosaurs!" 00:01:12-00:00:02:50). In reality, creationist scientists demonstrated that humans and dinosaurs coexisted, even before the term "dinosaur" was coined in the 19th century, through archeological and biblical evidence (00:03:40-00:04:18). For example, Job 41 mentions the Leviathan, which some believe to be another example of a dinosaur, a breathing fire creature often compared to a dragon. The existence of such creatures can also be found in historical accounts, such as Marco Polo's reports of dragons in China and the 1611 establishment of a royal dragon catcher, which suggests that what are now referred to as dinosaurs may have been known as dragons (00:23:05-00:24:06).

However, the persistence of creationists to rewrite science and history to fit their beliefs seems somewhat forced. The findings of these (pseudo)scientists are the result of manipulation and cherry-picking of secular research findings, which are often bizarre and, in the worst cases, even misleading. During their interviews, many speakers often hide behind their titles – almost always accomplished in sectarian colleges – to convince the audience of the veracity of their statements, presenting little verifiable evidence and examples. This pseudoscientific approach is particularly attractive and dangerous for homeschoolers – and creationism is one of the reasons why families decide to homeschool – who have no way of verifying this information unless they engage with the secular community.

In addition, this hammering determination to bend science to their will and beliefs appears to other communities as mere propaganda. Their materials are difficult for regular people (i.e., non-academics) to access, as if the only thing anyone needs to confirm their theories is the Bible, and they seem to repeat themselves constantly as if no discoveries have been made in recent years. Additionally, as seen in this paragraph, everyone seems to have a different opinion – if even possible – on specific topics, such as dinosaurs.

To answer the question posed in the title of this paragraph, it is almost evident that the inclusion of dinosaurs in the biblical worldview is not only a marketing strategy but also a propagandistic attempt to draw younger generations into their conservative net. If one looks closely at what is shown in these videos, one can see not only a manipulation of actual scientific theories but also an attempt to make children happy with the idea of a life where dinosaurs were the norm.

3.3.2 The Scopes Monkey Trial: An Open Wound

The previous chapter discussed the direct consequences of the Scopes Trial, such as the final break between fundamentalism and modernism and the withdrawal of fundamentalists from public life. It has also been noted how Bryan's image has been rehabilitated in recent years. Many creationists praise Darrow's arguments against teaching only a single theory of origins and see him as a proponent of a more balanced education. However, is the Scopes Trial still relevant in the 21st century?

The most famous scholar who extensively discussed the trial was Dr. David Menton (1938-2021), a speaker, author, and researcher with Answers in Genesis (AiG)[7] for over two decades. In his lectures and workshops at the Creation Museum, he educated families about God's plan, the flaws of evolutionary theory, the uniqueness of human beings, and the value of unborn life. Academically, Menton held a Ph.D. in biology from Brown University and taught at Washington College School of Medicine in St. Louis. Moreover, Menton was known for his lectures delivered at the Creation Museum in 2014, such as "The Hearing Ear and the Seeing Eye" (on the complexity of the human body), "Three Ways to Make an Ape-Man" (comparing fossilized apelike creatures to humans), "Evolution: Not a Chance" (on the improbability of life originating from non-life), and various apologetic lectures, including on the Scopes Trial, which he believed was largely misrepresented (Answer in Genesis).

[7] A ministry focused on apologetics aimed to help Christians defend their faith effectively (Answer in Genesis).

In a video from "The New Answers DVD 2" (2009), available for free on the official Answers in Genesis website, Dr. David Menton explains the process and its implications today in just a few minutes. To quote his words:

> The trial was a bit of a farce in many respects. Evolution was portrayed as basically embryology. Repeatedly, the lawyers and the expert witnesses tried to equate evolution with the embryological development of humans from a fertilized egg. Even with aging, the people who participated in the trial and the jury couldn't possibly have gotten any real idea of what evolution was all about. […]
>
> I think the basic issue that's important today, many years later, is the whole issue of the trial was really over what authority should parents have, if any, over what is taught [to] their children in the public school classroom, grade school, junior high, high school, even college, if supported by the funds of the state. These are still issues before us today. The arguments that we encounter in the trial do not differ greatly from the arguments we hear today between creationists and evolutionists.
>
> Nothing has really changed since 1925, and we can indeed profit from looking back at history. ("Why Is the Scopes Trial Significant?" 00:02:13-00:03:35)

It is clear from this excerpt that Menton views the Scopes trial as fundamental to evangelical identity and hopes that future generations will never forget what their ancestors fought for. Moreover, the Scopes Trial is also vital for non-evangelicals to understand the dynamics behind their faith and beliefs, illustrating how they still dream of an America united by a single faith: Protestant Christianity. As stated in the previous chapter, today's evangelicals do not seem as interested in getting involved in social struggles as they once did and focus instead solely on their faith. Menton, however, is not the only one who agrees with this idea.

Chapter 26 of "The New Answers Book 2" (2017), available for free on the same website, includes an article titled "Why Is the Scopes Trial Significant?" co-authored by Dr. Menton and Ken Ham (1951), the founder of Answers in Genesis (Answer in Genesis).

In this article, Menton and Ham argue that the removal of the Ten Commandments from public spaces symbolizes a border decline in Christian morality across America and the Western World, evident in issues like rising abortion rates, increasing divorce, and growing debates on the LGBTQIA+ community, and, they suggest, many people do not realize how these changes are connected to the Scopes Trial. During the trial, Bryan was questioned about biblical passages, but his inability to defend the Bible's historical accuracy weakened the Bible's authority. Consequently, this event paved the way for secular ideas to shape culture and

education, as many Christians today have rejected the Bible and embraced these teachings, and children have been taught that the Bible, especially Genesis, cannot be trusted. Moreover, this decline in Bible-based morality also led to the decreasing influence of Christianity in the West.

To counteract this trend, Menton and Ham claim that it is not enough to protest the removal of the Ten Commandments or any other anti-Christian measures (such as abortion or gay marriage). Instead, evangelicals must teach why the Bible is trustworthy in all the areas it addresses, especially about science and evolution. By giving biblical answers to the world's questions, indeed, people will realize that the Bible is not only reliable in "earthly" matters but also in "heavenly" ones, as Jesus teaches in John 3:12: "If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe when I tell you heavenly things?" (Answer in Genesis).

More recently, on March 11, 2016, Cornerstone Television Network uploaded a two-part documentary on the Scopes Trial, "The Scopes Monkey Trial," in which Donn Chapman interviews Dr. Menton about the trial's historical and cultural implications (Cornerstone Television Network).

Many consider the Scopes Trial to be the most famous in American history; however, many people today do not know that it even took place ("The Scopes Monkey Trial – Part 1," 00:01:36 – 00:01:52) and, despite being part of popular culture, much of what is believed today about the Scopes trial is only thanks to the arts, particularly cinema and theater. A particularly famous and influential play titled "Inherit the Wind," written in 1955, and its subsequent 1960 film adaptation have significantly shaped public perception of the Scopes Trial, suggesting that a high school biology teacher in Dayton, who innocently taught the theory of evolution, was aggressively attacked by prejudiced townspeople, including a local fundamentalist preacher. These people are portrayed as bigoted Christians and politicians who forcibly removed John Scopes from his classroom, threw him in jail, and incited townspeople to threaten him with lynching. The trial is portrayed as nothing more than a witch hunt, and this distorted version of events is still perpetuated, shown in science and English classes, and even performed in school plays. Moreover, it is rarely admitted that this narrative is far from the truth (00:02:40-00:04:26).

Menton, then, suggests to the audience a more accurate book on the trial, though out of print, *The Great Monkey Trial* (1968) by L. Sprague de Camp (1907-2000), who points out that the trial was not a witch hunt, as it has often been portrayed, as the ones trying to challenge and possibly overturn the existing law were the accused and his defense attorneys. So, this trial was not about citizens targeting John Scopes but rather about Scopes being used to effect a change in the law (00:04:29 – 00:05:45).

The ACLU, which opposed such restrictions, sought to challenge and invalidate the Butler Act, knowing that success in Tennessee would have implications for other states with similar laws. The broader context of this legal challenge was a cultural conflict between maintaining a Christian society that upheld the Bible and moving toward a non-Christian culture that rejected biblical teachings. This tension marked a critical point in 1925 that led to significant changes in American education, underscoring the continuing relevance of these issues (00:07:08 – 00:07:42).

The second reason this trial attracted so much attention was the involvement of the country's most renowned lawyers, scholars, and experts at the time, with the two most famous being William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) and Clarence Darrow (1857-1938).

Bryan, known for his oratory skills, sought to affirm the right of taxpayers to influence the content of education in public schools, especially when it conflicted with Christian beliefs. He also wanted to distinguish between the teaching of evolution as theory and fact, although this distinction was never fully realized. Bryan's third aim was to ensure that any teacher found guilty of breaking the law should have the opportunity to resign rather than be fined or imprisoned. Contrary to any punitive intent, Bryan believed that teaching evolution in schools was acceptable if presented as a theory with evidence for and against it, a view that many Americans still support ("The Scopes Monkey Trial – Part 2," 00:06:08 – 00:07:22).

Conversely, Darrow was America's most famous criminal defense attorney and a critic of fundamentalist Christianity. His main goal was to draw national attention to the fundamentalist agenda, in this case, Bryan's, in America, with the explicit intention of discrediting them. Unlike Bryan, whose statements reflected a degree of charity, Darrow's comments were characterized by arrogance, anger, and bitterness. This hostility was also evident in the courtroom, where Darrow repeatedly insulted the jurors and Judge Ralston, resulting in a contempt of court citation. As a result, the ACLU was forced to not include Darrow in an appeal given the antipathy he generated during this first trial ("The Scopes Monkey Trial – Part 2," 00:07:38 – 00:08:51).

Among the key experts was Dr. Maynard Metcalf (1868-1940), a zoologist from Johns Hopkins University (1876, Baltimore) and an authority on evolution. When asked about his qualifications, Dr. Metcalf described his interest in the evolution of individual organisms and the broader evolution of life from its beginnings. However, his testimony indicated that he was an expert on the aging process rather than the evolution of species, which further needed clarification in the court. To clarify the concept of evolution, Judge Ralston asked Dr. Metcalf for a precise definition, which resulted in a detailed and complex description of evolution as

the change in an organism's characteristics over time. However, he confused the court even more (00:16:05 – 00:18:31).

Also, throughout the trial, Darrow attempted to challenge Bryan by mocking and discrediting biblical miracles. Bryan skillfully responded with Bible quotes, putting Darrow in a position to reject the Bible entirely. Despite Bryan's impressive performance, Darrow finally cornered him with a question about the creation of the earth in six days. When Bryan explained that the Bible does not specify 24-hour days, Darrow took the opportunity to point out this inconsistency, putting Bryan at a disadvantage, arguing that science could replace the Bible and that, when scientific speculation contradicted Scripture, human reason should be followed instead (00:18:37-00:21:03).

Menton's lecture emphasizes the Scopes Trial's significant role not only as a historical event but also because of its lasting impact on the American religious and cultural landscape, causing a decline of Christian values in public (and private) life. Therefore, evangelicals who want to uphold biblical teachings in America must recognize, understand, and address this critical historical moment. According to Menton, future generations must resist and work hard to restore the influence of the Christian faith, relying on their love for God and knowledge of Scripture. However, this active and almost aggressive resistance against the secular world may result in a state of paranoia similar to the Red Scare, when people found communists everywhere and nobody felt safe. In our world, Christians do not represent a minority nor a last bastion of civilizations. On the contrary, it represents most of the white population, which, historically, has always been the oppressor and not the victim. Despite this detail, Menton is not wrong: knowing one's history is always important to understand what went wrong and to adjust it, even when talking about creationist Christians.

3.3.3 Dismantling Darwinism in the 21st Century

Darwinism's criticism has long been a strong point of evangelicals' campaign against secularization, a stance that has persisted into the 21st century. However, their arguments have evolved over time to better align with new scientific discoveries, passing from simple argumentations ("God did that") to a more complex one that reflects a deeper study, cherry-picking, and manipulation of theories to fit one's own vision. This shift is evident not only in scholarly articles but also in television programs like "Origins."

One of the most recent documentaries is "Darwinism Doesn't Work," uploaded in two parts on YouTube in 2022. In these episodes, Heiple, Chapman's successor, joins Dr. John

Baumgardner to explain why Darwinism does not work as a scientific theory, providing ample and diverse evidence (Cornerstone Television Network).

Baumgardner graduated in electrical engineering, but his life completely changed after his conversion in 1970, after which he joined Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru, 1951) and observed how the theory of evolution was deliberately used to challenge the faith of Christian college students, encouraging him to give lectures and host forums that exposed the flaws in the claims of the theory of evolution. From 1984 to 2004, Baumgardner worked as a research associate in the Los Alamos Theoretical Division, where he continued his research on planetary mantle dynamics, which were later presented at seven international conferences on creationism, among other research in fluid dynamics. Moreover, between 1997 and 2005, he was involved in the Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth (RATE) project, which provided extensive radio isotopic evidence that the Earth is thousands, not billions, of years old. Finally, between 2005 and 2008, he worked as a full-time scientist at the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) in California, where he helped develop "Mendel's Accountant," a genetics program that demonstrates the limits of natural selection (Baumgardner).

As a guest at "Origins," Baumgardner expounded his findings about non-material elements in life as the ultimate proof of Darwinism inaccuracy. While the first part introduces his thesis and focuses on the complexity of the various forms of life and how the theory of evolution has no real answer to such questions, the second part of the documentary focuses on one of the most important non-material processes: language. As a whole, the documentary is well-presented, and Baumgardner uses (pseudo)scientific studies to support his findings, but as "Origins" provides short video lectures, Baumgardner had to adapt his exposition with more accessible language and reasonings to adapt to the necessities of the general public.

The first video opens with Baumgardner's explanation of the theory of evolution, mainly focusing on its successors and the birth of Modern synthesis. In particular, this first part of the documentary can be summarized as an attempt to undermine modern synthesis by analyzing natural selection, genetic inheritance, and random mutation from a creationist point of view. According to Baumgardner, over the past 75 years, Darwinism has never been confuted but still adheres to modern synthesis as one of its pillars ("Darwinism Doesn't Work – Part 1," 00:02:57 – 00:03:21), despite seeming incompatible to Gregor Mendel's (1822-1884) theory of genetic synthesis, which demonstrates how traits are inherited through the genes according to specific mathematical laws. This discovery, formulated between 1856 and 1863, had a significant impact on the scientific world, especially in the 20th century, as it clarified some less precise aspects of Darwin's theory of evolution, such as the concept of "mixed" inheritance

(00:04:23 – 00:05:36). The last pillar of Modern synthesis is the theory of random mutation, proposed by Thomas Morgan (1866-1945) in 1910, which led to the recognition of chromosomes as the carriers of genes, proving Mendel's research and explaining what Darwin meant by "natural selection" (00:05:36-00:06:15).

Modern synthesis, or neo-Darwinism, claims to explain the origin of all living organisms by natural processes, without the need for an intelligent creator, where time is a crucial factor that allows for the gradual accumulation of changes that lead to the diversity of life that can be observed today (00:06:31-00:06:53). However, the advances in molecular biology that occurred after the 1940s made this theory scientifically indefensible, mainly because of the existence of a crucial non-material component in life.

Compared to software, non-material processes are living systems that characterize every living being, but these cannot be explained by material theories like Darwinism, as proven by more recent discoveries such as the 1950s research on molecular biology. (00: 07:50-00:26:42). According to Baumgardner, one of the most essential non-material processes is language, both visual (letters and words) and auditory (sounds) ("Darwinism Doesn't Work Part 2," 00:10:09-00:11:01). Random material processes, he highlights, cannot produce meaningful linguistic sequences as testified by his random signs experiment, which produced gibberish rather than meaningful language (00:22:43 – 00:23:39). Then, he extends this reasoning to genetic language, arguing that the complexity of the genome far exceeds any artificial software system and requires a mind with extraordinary abilities – one that he believes can only be God (00:23:42 – 00:23:57).

Baumgardner uses the linguistic structure of the DNA as evidence, pointing out that its complexity only confirms the existence of a divine creator. To further prove his point, the scientist references Romans 1:19-20: "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. His invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been perceived ever since the world's creation in the things made. So, they are without excuse." God has made himself known through his creation, and modern scientific discoveries only confirm his power (00:25:11 – 00:26:39).

Baumgardner's research, however, is far more complex than that, and you can read more extensively on it in *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation* (1999), edited by John F. Ashton (1947), in which Baumgardner was interviewed.

While many evolutionists are convinced that the assumed age of the cosmos, 15 billion years, provides sufficient time for random interactions of atoms and molecules to produce life, Baumgardner considers this belief to be nothing more than an irrational fantasy. He is

determined to prove this through arithmetic calculations on the upper limit for the total number of interatomic interactions (Ashton 223-224).

Nevertheless, Baumgardner faced partial acceptance of his theories and calculations by the scientific community. For example, a retired Los Alamos National Laboratory chemist argued that his reasoning was flawed because it did not consider the details of chemical reaction kinetics. Baumgardner argues that he deliberately chose such an enormous reaction speed that all such considerations are irrelevant. He considers it irrational that anyone trained in chemistry or physics can imagine how polypeptides fold into their three-dimensional structures and express their unique properties within a fraction of a picosecond. On the other hand, a physicist at Sandia National Laboratories claimed that Baumgardner had misapplied the rules of probability in his analysis, saying that if Baumgardner's example were correct, it would "turn the scientific world on its head." Baumgardner said his analysis is so straightforward that it requires no special intelligence or advanced scientific training to understand his findings. His approach was to estimate a generous upper bound on the maximum number of chemical reactions that could have taken place in the history of the cosmos and compare this with the number of trials required to find a single viable protein with minimal functionality among the possible candidates (226). The latter number, he showed, was orders of magnitude greater than the former. Baumgardner emphasizes that he did not apply the laws of probability incorrectly but in the same way that physicists do in their daily work.

Focusing on DNA and coded language, Baumgardner explains that language comprises a symbolic code, a vocabulary, and a set of grammatical rules to communicate or record thoughts. Although many people spend most of their time generating, processing, or disseminating linguistic data, they rarely think language structures are clear manifestations of non-material reality (227). He illustrates this by stating that linguistic information is independent of its material carrier as the message's meaning does not change regardless of whether sound waves, ink on paper, magnetic domains on a floppy disk, or voltage patterns in a transistor network transmit it.

Baumgardner also refers to Albert Einstein, who recognized the nature and origin of symbolic information as one of the most profound questions in the world. Einstein recognized that matter cannot give meaning to symbols, concluding that symbolic information or language separates reality from matter and energy.

However, a question arises: where does linguistic information come from? Baumgardner notes that in human experience, language is directly associated with the complex nature of the human mind. Given that something as real as linguistic information exists

independently of matter and energy, it is reasonable to assume that an entity capable of generating linguistic information is also fundamentally non-material (228). This leads to the conclusion that materialism, the philosophical perspective long prevalent in scientific circles that denies any non-material reality, is fundamentally wrong. Nevertheless, how can symbolic language be explained as an essential component of the development and function of all living organisms? For Baumgardner, the answer is clear: an intelligent creator is undeniably necessary.

Regarding macroevolution, Baumgardner cites Professor Murray Eden (1920-2020), a specialist in information theory and formal languages at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, Cambridge, Massachusetts). Eden pointed out that random perturbations of formal language structures do not lead to the creation of new, meaningful structures. Eden noted that no existing formal language can tolerate random changes in its sequence of symbols without destroying meaning. All changes must be syntactically legitimate, and Eden suggested that "genetic grammaticality" has a deterministic explanation that is not based on selection pressure acting on random variation (229-230).

Baumgardner concludes that random changes in the letters of the genetic alphabet are no more capable of generating functional new protein structures than random amino acid chains. This is a glaring and fatal flaw in any materialistic mechanism for macroevolution. Life depends on complex non-material language structures, and material processes cannot create or modify these structures to specify new functions. Consequently, if creating the 1,000 or so genes required to specify the cellular machinery in a bacterium is unthinkable in a materialist framework, then the task of providing the 100,000 or so genes required to specify a mammal is even more so.

Despite the abundance of evolutionist publications that posit material processes as sufficient to account for macroevolutionary phenomena, Baumgardner contends that such a belief needs a rational foundation. He argues that this belief amounts to mere fantasy, as the existence of coded language structures, which are inherently non-material, undeniably necessitates a non-material explanation (230).

A similar documentary is "Darwin's Sacred Imposter" (2023), a two-part series in which Ray Heiple and Dr. Randy Guliuzza, the president of the Institute for Creation Research, discuss the impact of Darwin's theory on modern biology and our worldview. They highlight, in particular, how Darwinism has poisoned the reasoning of the general audience and academics and encouraged the belief in impersonal and purposeless natural force, replacing the faith in God's plan and leading to significantly negative consequences for both science and society ("Darwin's Sacred Imposter – Part 1," 00:02:17-00:06:47).

To support his thesis and refute Darwin's ideas, Guliuzza uses various examples and quotes from numerous scientists who have expressed their concerns about Darwin's theory over the years. The first is Francis A. Allen, who argued that Darwin did not discover natural selection but instead invented a concept that brought the origin and adaptation of organisms into the scientific realm. However, Darwin's definition personalizes nature by attributing actions such as sorting and preference, suggesting that nature performs these tasks creatively but unconsciously. However, this metaphor implies a purposeful agent, similar to a breeder, subtly suggesting God-like qualities and allowing for an almost theological interpretation of nature's actions, which Darwin and his successors sought to eliminate from the beginning. One prominent critic, Richard Lewontin, points out that Darwin's concept of natural selection implies that nature acts like an omniscient and omnipresent deity, scrutinizing every variation and making decisions. Darwin recognized this problem and admitted in 1868 that the term "natural selection" was problematic because it suggested a conscious decision (00:06:50-00:22:06).

Other evolutionary researchers have also criticized this metaphor, such as Greg Graffin (1964), a biology professor at UCLA, who noted that discussions of natural selection often sound as if they are referring to a god-like force when, in fact, it is a concept that does not exist. Similarly, Robert Reed, a Canadian evolutionary biologist, has observed that the language of neo-Darwinism is so imprecise that terms such as "divine design" could easily be replaced with "selection pressure" in popular biological literature without disrupting the argument. Moreover, even contemporary evolutionist publications and biologists concede that the nature of natural selection is controversial and that there is no consensus on whether it is a force, a principle, or something else entirely ("Darwin's Sacred Imposter – Part 2," 00:05:24-00:06:31).

So, while Baumgardner's argument challenges the foundations of materialistic explanations for the origin of life, asserting that random chemical interactions or evolutionary processes cannot adequately explain the complexity and non-material nature of linguistic information in DNA, Guliuzza focuses on Darwinian evolution's keywords and their vague and misleading use. Both these scientists argue their thesis using a scientific approach, using different sources, quotes, and examples to adjust their message for the audience.

However, the anti-Darwinian positions in "Origins" were not always based on scientific analysis and data. For example, one controversial approach taken to discredit Darwinism is to link this theory to its consequences, such as the adverse historical events of the last century. Many experts and academics point out that while Darwin is one of the heroes of today's secular society, many people do not know or ignore that Darwin was the inspiration for people who

later developed eugenics and thus also for people like Stalin, Mao, and Hitler. Despite this argument being reasonable to the eyes of creationists, the arguments, the mode of executions, and the severe tone do not suggest a scientific approach to the topic, but rather a conspiracy theory suggesting that Darwin's theory is not only wrong because it eliminates God from its reasonings, but also because its consequences were catastrophic. Over the years, many speakers at "Origins" used this argumentation as proof of Darwin's fallacy, such as Dr. Jerry Bergman, a Research Associate of the ICR since 2018 and has participated in many lectures and radio and television programs in the United States and Europe to discuss his research ("The Darwin Effect," 00:01:15-00:01:34). Over the years, he participated in various episodes of "Origins" with lectures that focus on the negative consequences of Darwinism.

In "The Darwin Effect" episode, based on the same name book written by Bergman and published in 2014, Donn Chapman interviews Bergman on the negative impact of Darwinism on society and how Darwinism had a significant influence, albeit indirectly, on many 20th-century theories such as eugenics and ideologies such as Nazism and Communism (00:01:47-00:04:49).

In his lecture, Bergman starts by defining evolution, explaining that life evolves through the accumulation of billions of harmful or near-neutral mutations, eventually leading to genetic entropy, in which small, seemingly insignificant genetic changes accumulate over generations and eventually cause species to deteriorate and become extinct – in other words, to regress rather than evolve. This view is supported by many scientists who have observed that each generation accumulates between 50 and 100 new mutations, which, over time, becomes an unsustainable number. Moreover, Bergman notes that it moves in the wrong direction, which is well documented in the scientific literature panorama (00:05:04-00:09:37). The first example Bergman cites is Karl Marx (1818-1883), who, under the influence of Darwinism, abandoned his Christian beliefs and became an essential figure in the development of socialism, which had a lasting impact on world history, evolving in the communist ideology promoted by Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) and Iosif Stalin (1878-1953), two devoted Christians who turned to Marxism once they discovered and embraced Darwinism. Their shift from a Christian to a Darwinian worldview led them to justify the elimination of those who opposed their ideologies. This led to the deaths of millions of people and a massive increase in Christian martyrs: 45.5 million died in the 20th century alone (00:09:42-00:14:46).

This idea that Darwinism helped spread 20th-century ideologies is echoed in "Hitler's Darwinian Worldview," uploaded to YouTube only a few days after the episode discussed. Here, Bergman focuses only on Nazism, explaining to the audience that Hitler (1889-1945) was able

to gain millions of followers not only through *Mein Kampf* (1925) but also by using Darwinian theory to his advantage, especially when it came to German racial purity. Indeed, eugenics, developed by Francis Galton (1822-1911), Darwin's cousin, played a crucial role in Nazi Germany, helping the Germans to identify what they considered to be inferior ethnicities based on various physical measurements and tables, such as skull size and eye color. In addition, numerous inhumane experiments were carried out on Jewish prisoners, particularly by the infamous Joseph Mengele (1911-1979), who had a PhD and an MD in evolutionary biology ("Hitler's Darwinian Worldview," 00:05:42-00:11:56).

Another important goal that the Nazis tried to achieve was the replacement of Christian doctrine with the ideology outlined in the *Mein Kampf*. The leading figure in this persecution was Hermann Göring (1893-1946), who is an example of a common path of leading Nazis: many of them were brought up as active Christians but switched to anti-Christian views after learning about Darwin's theories. Darwin's ideas were often the first step on their path from Christians to anti-Christians and eventually to Nazis and eugenicists, a consistent pattern among many high-ranking Nazi officials (00:12:15-00:16:16:26).

This change usually began in school, often as early as high school, and intensified at universities, where Darwinism gained prominence. Many saw National Socialism as the practical application of Darwinian science to society, and a notable example is Heinrich Himmler (1900-1945), who, after studying biology, rose through the Nazi ranks and played a central role in managing the concentration camps and orchestrating their operations, including the gas chambers (00:16:48-00:17:40).

Darwin's work sought to eliminate the need for a creator and thus undermine belief in God, and Darwinism became the engine of atheism. Figures such as Richard Dawkins (1941), an evolutionary biologist and science communicator, argue that one can be an intellectually fulfilled atheist thanks to evolution, while surveys show that 98% of leading scientists are atheists, reflecting the influence of Darwinism in the academic world. However, despite the overwhelming evidence against Darwinism, it is still widely accepted, partly due to legal and social pressures within academia ("The Darwin Effect," 00:17:17-00:22:35). As Christians, Bergman concludes, ideas have consequences, and people must counter the widespread acceptance of Darwinism by holding fast to the truth of creation as revealed in the Bible and remaining vigilant against the destructive ways that deviate from God's plan. The path away from God is a path of destruction, and people must continue to hold to the worldview that recognizes God as the original creator in hopes of inspiring others to do the same in the near future (00:25:21-00:25:40).

The fight against Darwinism has always been the favorite forte of creationism, as if the scientific community had no other theories discussed and proven and had only recently adopted a (pseudo)scientific approach. For example, Baumgardner and Bergman's approach is antipodal, with Baumgardner using scientific theories and examples and Bergman focusing on history and philosophy.

For his lecture, Baumgardner uses two examples: protein formation and language. Concerning language, he claims that since Darwinism is a material theory, it cannot explain non-material processes. However, Baumgardner does not address linguistic studies on the origin of language, which has been debated for centuries, preferring to mention only Darwin's position. While linguists claimed for years that linguistic knowledge is innate, a new theory has recently emerged that language arises from use and structure develops through cognitive patterns resulting from actual language use. However, these studies on language are constantly changing and producing new findings that consider linguistic, genetic, neural, and social factors (Markov, Kharitonova, et al.).

On the other hand, Bergman analyzes Marxism and eugenics, two theories that have nothing in common if they are not distantly related to Darwin. For instance, Marx did not invent socialism but revised the existing literature and wrote a manifesto, nor was Marx involved in what happened in Russia, where his words were interpreted and adapted to suit the cause – much like creationists do when they criticize secular theories. Concerning eugenics, while it should be regarded as an inexact theory that led to irreparable consequences, the direct link between Darwin and the Holocaust seems a forced conspiracy theory meant to scare the audience and hate science even more.

Finally, an interesting aspect of this debate is its development over the years. Compared to the Scopes Trial, where Bryan struggled to defend his position convincingly, the arguments presented in the "Origins" episodes represent a significant improvement that cannot be overlooked. While still reminiscent of conspiracy theories and extreme manipulation of source texts, indeed, guests have learned to debunk and argue their claims by offering "bulletproof" examples and evidence. For example, Baumgardner's studies on proteins and language are evidence of in-depth research, especially in his article, where he even proposes complicated calculations.

At the same time, however, this development is only at the beginning of its journey. As seen with Mortenson, Oard, Harrub, Bergman, and Guliuzza, the creationists' arguments cannot work without referring to the Bible or discrediting Darwin's theory – without even considering other scientific theories – as if they could not exist on their own, which is insufficient to provide

a balanced perspective and highlights how misinterpretation and selective interpretation can reinforce misunderstandings rather than promote constructive dialog.

CHAPTER 4
CREATIONIST LITERATURE

4.1 Evangelical Literature: An Overview

In the early 19th century, many institutions supported charitable initiatives such as missionary work, temperance, and the suppression of vice. Wealthy individuals were often encouraged to fund these costly activities, which were essential to the evangelical movements of the time and were seen as a means of achieving their social and religious goals (Vaca 23). In addition, the charities encouraged cooperation across regional and denominational boundaries and emphasized the need for an ecumenical evangelical effort to provide evangelical literature to every family in the country (25).

However, these institutions faced ongoing logistical and financial challenges in printing and distributing materials, especially as they sought to disseminate their publications widely at a reasonable cost to readers. To counter their economic limitations, Bible societies and the American Tract Society (ATS, 1825) sold literature to those who could afford it, allowing paying customers to fund free material for less fortunate readers to encourage them to buy more in the future (26). Despite this shift to sales, not everyone favored this change, fearing that the increasing emphasis on business methods would lead to a focus on profit and, ultimately, moral decay in content.

Nonetheless, between the 1820s and 1830s, evangelical publishers led the way in innovations in papermaking, mass production, and communication. By 1855, they accounted for 16% of all book publishing in the US, improved communication with local booksellers, introduced commission-based sales models, and adapted their marketing strategies to regional preferences (27). Despite their efforts, denominational and commercial publishers divided the market by the end of the century, focusing on rural distribution and advertising and marketing strategies that capitalized on middle-class consumer culture (28) and promoted an evangelical ecumenism that encouraged Protestants to see themselves as people who should desire cultural products (29).

After Dwight L. Moody returned to America in 1875, many publishers decided to capitalize on his fame – the so-called “Moody market” – and began publishing unauthorized collections of his sermons (32). Initially, Moody expressed concerns about possible accusations that his ministry was a commercial enterprise (33). Therefore, around 1875, he decided to take

the growing demand for his teachings and brand into his own hands by giving his brother-in-law Fleming Hewitt Revell (1849-1931) exclusive rights to produce his authorized publications (36). Revell had a keen business sense and soon created a publishing empire that had exclusive access to Moody's work and controlled much of the evangelical publishing of the time. Many authors sought the respectability and legitimacy associated with Moody (41), which enabled Revell to invest early on in new theological ideas such as premillennialism and dispensationalism (43). In addition, The Fleming H. Revell Company's focus on the needs of the middle class led to the founding of the Bible Institute Colportage Association (BICA, 1894), which sought to make Christian literature more accessible to people in non-urban areas such as prisons and rural areas who were seeking spiritual support (48-49).

The Revell Company played a crucial role in supporting BICA from the beginning, especially since Revell owned the copyrights and printing plates for many books BICA wanted to distribute (50). However, this support was not without its problems: specializing in the distribution of cheap paperback editions of Revell's titles, BICA undercut the sale of Revell's more expensive editions, leading Revell to charge BICA at least 30% more than the going rate for printing. The pressure on BICA intensified when the U.S. Postal Service changed its mailing policies and restricted second-class status to legitimate post-1901 periodicals (51). This forced BICA to pay higher rates and increase costs from one cent to three cents per book, severely hampered operations in rural and frontier areas. Revell was initially unwilling to lower its rates but eventually agreed to arbitration, which resulted in terms that were primarily favorable to the company: while BICA received discounts for large orders, Revell retained control of the most profitable titles and continued to print the bound editions.

By the late 1890s, the Revell Company realized its identity as a publisher of evangelical literature was limiting its ability to tap into more profitable consumer markets. Revell moved away from the explicitly evangelical brand and began publishing books aligned with middle-class evangelical values but did not contain overtly religious themes, such as didactic and moralistic fiction and nonfiction (53). In the 1920s, Revell's focus on commerciality led to competition with "secular" literature that could not be overcome, and the publisher lost much of the liberal evangelical market to other competitors, such as Harper & Brothers (55).

Following Revell's lead, many publishers built their brand on publishing theological books to justify their business intellectually and spiritually, such as the William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (1911), one of the first and most prominent publishers dedicated to the Dutch community (62). Although Eerdmans moved away from the Dutch in the 1920s (64), his books were often described as distinctive and exclusive, found nowhere else. Thus, he appealed

to the Christian Reformed Church and to consumers attracted to theological and cultural distinctiveness. Among these potential customers were many self-identified fundamentalists who shared many characteristics with this community, particularly their common rejection of theological modernism. Encouraged by its community to publish Reformed literature and curate works reflecting complementary perspectives, the Eerdmans Company established business relationships with various authors, institutions, and booksellers (76), achieving considerable commercial success that even led to the establishment of a formal program for unsolicited manuscript submissions, marketing strategies, and retail experiences that aligned with the brand's goals (82).

While in more recent times, scholars often portray evangelicals as part of a religious subculture distanced from mainstream American society, this view does not always do justice to the fact that evangelicals sought to expand their influence and presence (99). In the first half of the twentieth century, evangelical leaders and institutions strove to infuse American society with their unique form of Protestantism by aligning themselves with mass market strategies to maximize their reach. A notable example is *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915), discussed earlier in Chapter 1, which sought to define the core principles of the true Christian faith while avoiding controversial issues and aiming to penetrate American society with their vision of pure religion (100).

Throughout book publishing, many investors have established organizations to provide practical support to their members, especially during economic crises or times of change, such as wars or depressions. These trade associations played a significant role in the book industry and other complex industries where technologies evolve rapidly or collaboration across production and distribution networks is required. Trade associations have typically focused on trade agreements and promoting cooperation, fair competition, and shared goals by helping booksellers pursue common business and cultural objectives through store design, product selection, and merchandising. In this vein, the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE, 1942) claimed to represent American Protestants and, like the trade associations, sought to unite their constituencies around common economic and cultural goals (104).

NAE leaders called for uncompromising cooperation to promote unity and urged members to overcome theological differences and unite under the label "evangelical" (neo-evangelicals) (107). In addition, the NAE identified and advocated for policies and goals that benefited its members. In doing so, it recognized the importance of publishing and bookselling as professions that required lobbying and could strengthen evangelical unity (108). As evangelical publishers expanded their offerings, the NAE developed lists of recommended

books for booksellers and readers to promote a common evangelical identity independent of denominational affiliations or governmental influence (113). This initiative aimed to reshape evangelicals' reading habits and publishing practices. It saw books as a means for evangelicals to deepen their convictions, not just a tool for evangelism, and believed such empowerment would increase their effectiveness in evangelism (114). Inspired by the potential impact of books, NAE leaders purchased the Standard Publishing Company in Cincinnati in 1955 (115).

In addition, trade associations fostered a collective identity among their members by pursuing common goals and practices, promoting common trade strategies and store designs, and organizing regular meetings and conventions. For example, the Christian Booksellers Association (CBA, 1950) held several conventions to connect Christian booksellers, invited them to conferences, and encouraged publishers to participate, emphasizing the opportunity to reach booksellers effectively and inexpensively (116). While the CBA aimed to foster a sense of unity between publishers and booksellers, it also motivated publishers to form their own trade associations, as was to happen in 1974 when Eerdmans proposed to unite independent evangelical publishers, leading to the formation of the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association (ECPA). In terms of readership, the CBA encouraged its members to view the book trade as both a business and a spiritual calling, to instill confidence in the industry, to help readers understand their vital role, and to position the book trade as a vital engine for evangelical culture and an important avenue for evangelicals to achieve their mass market aspirations (121).

4.2 Evangelical Children's Literature

Since the 18th century, Christian churches have recognized the importance of reaching out to children and involving them in denominational life, using various methods such as Sunday schools and literature as practical means of communication to make children active church members and ensure its continuity. Over the years, this tradition grew and developed, adapting to new pedagogical theories and educational methods and becoming one of the most productive and profitable publishing categories (Smale 24). It was a genre with sufficient theological significance, stylistic consistency, and a substantial body of work by the mid-nineteenth century to be considered a literary genre, distinct from the moralistic and didactic children's literature of the same period. Rather than merely educating children to be morally upright citizens, evangelical authors attempted to proselytize and recruit followers by embedding theological themes and ideas in their works informed by their faith (23). A comprehensive

overview of evangelical authors' various church affiliations reveals denominational differences and shared spiritual motivation for their writing (24).

Evangelical authors use the Bible in various ways in children's literature to promote conservative notions of faith, piety, Sabbatianism[8], and daily spiritual guidance and engage with some of the most controversial past and present debates. The authority of the Bible is often used as an argument to teach children the evangelical faith, whether through allegory, symbolism, historical narrative, or popular scientific accounts of God's creation. Despite the upheavals caused by new scientific theories in geology and evolution and new approaches to biblical and historical criticism, evangelical authors held steadfastly to the divine and inspired status of the Bible, endeavoring to make it accessible and understandable to children (175).

However, this area of research remains unexplored mainly by scholars in fields such as theology, women's history, church history, children's literature, and sociology, highlighting the vast possibilities for further study (221). Given the nature of this thesis, only contemporary publications are analyzed and discussed to align them with the media and institutions examined in the other chapters. Similarly, the themes of the books have been chosen. For example*, The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* and *Truth Chronicles* focus on dinosaurs as evidence for the inerrancy of the Bible, which is confirmed by the occurrence of similar creatures in Scripture. *On the other hand, the Truth Chronicles* and *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls* focus on time-traveling adventures in a biblical context. This uniformity was chosen to show how similar books explain biblical apologetics and appeal to their readership.

4.2.1 Dinosaurs and Biblical Worldview: *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible*

The Great Dinosaur Mystery and The Bible is a book by Paul S. Taylor (1953-), initially published in 1987 by Chariot Victor Publishing, a division of Cook Communication (Paris, Ontario), formerly David C. Cook Publishing Co. (Balmer 188), and then updated and republished in 1998.

The 1998 edition opens with two statements intended to confirm the apologetic nature of the book. They come from Henry M. Morris (1918-2006), the founder of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR, 1970), and from Apologetics Press (AP), a nonprofit organization dedicated to the defense of Christianity (Apologetics Press). In his statement, Morris reviews

[8] a Jewish movement begun by Ottoman Jew Sabbatai Tsevi's (1626-1676) messianic pronouncements (Oxford Bibliographies).

the book, emphasizing that children will enjoy exploring one of their favorite topics, while adults will appreciate the new insights into the nature of these creatures from the past. Furthermore, Morris notes that this account of the dinosaurs fits naturally into the biblical account of recent creation and the global Flood, making it an essential contribution to biblical apologetics. Finally, Morris adds that the author, Paul Taylor, is also the writer and director of the Christian movie "The Great Dinosaur Mystery," which he recommends for families, churches, and Christian schools. On the other hand, the note from Apologetics Press serves to reassure parents by confirming that the book is safe for creationists – even if AP cannot prove that everything it contains is perfectly consistent with the Bible.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, covering the history of dinosaurs from their appearance on earth during creation to their extinction after the Flood, without using secular theories and helping readers understand how everything in the world results from God's plan.

The first topic discussed includes the first two chapters, which define dinosaurs and explain why secular theories cannot be trusted. Specifically, Taylor explains that the findings of dinosaurs were arranged by paleontologists, such as *Brontosaurus*, which never existed as paleontologists matched the skeleton of a species of *Diplodocus* with the skull of an *Apatosaurus* found three or four miles away (Taylor 13). However, scientists have not been simplistic in their descriptions of dinosaurs. On the contrary, Taylor notes, they often tell creative stories about how the dinosaurs looked and behaved, which indicates that these descriptions are based on assumptions and the reconstructions they have made. Additionally, all the pictures and contemporary media productions are inaccurate and contain at least some false information (14).

After this introductory section, Taylor sets out the creationist theories about dinosaurs, citing the Bible where necessary. According to Taylor, when God created the world, dinosaurs were one of his creations, appearing along with the other animals, as explained in Genesis 1:20-25, and coexisting with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (16). After the Fall, the dinosaurs continued to live on the earth. Here, Taylor explains to his readers that the Bible does not use the word "dinosaur," as it was coined during the 19th century, but mentions different creatures, such as the Behemoth and the Tannin (18). The Behemoth is first mentioned in Job 40:15-24, described as the most extraordinary creature on earth, unbeatable to anyone but its creator (Job 40:15- 24). In some versions of the Bible, the word "behemoth" is replaced by the name hippopotamus, as the name is used for describing a large and powerful mythological creature. On the other hand, Tannin is more challenging to define since, in many versions, it is used as a synonym for other creatures, such as the Leviathan, and many theologians disagree on

definitions. For example, while some theologians prefer translating this word based on its context, confusion arises when more than two words are very similar, such as the singular nouns "Tannìn" and "Tannìm," where Tannìn often refers to an amphibious serpent or a dragon. Furthermore, evolutionary ideas have influenced all research areas, and most theologians are unwilling to admit that this word could refer to an actual "dragon" (Salamone n.p.).

Taylor then focuses on life with the dinosaurs, explaining that, although God's purpose remains unclear, they were harmless, vegetarian creatures that befriended the first humans (20). In the original creation, dinosaurs were meant to please humanity and benefit the world, just like all other animals (54). Thus, Taylor explains that some dinosaurs' sharp teeth and claws made humans believe they were aggressive animals, such as the *Tyrannosaurus rex*, which was often portrayed as a killer despite its hunched posture and crouched gait. If some of the dinosaurs killed by the Flood ate meat, Taylor claims, they were probably scavengers that fed on the bodies of large dead animals (55).

The final topic deals with the many theories about the disappearance of the dinosaurs, distinguishing between secular and creationist theories and findings. Secular theories attribute the extinction of the dinosaurs to external causes such as meteorite impacts or temperature fluctuations, while creationists believe that their disappearance was due to the Flood, a catastrophic event described in Genesis 6:9-8:19 (25). The only people who were spared were Noah and his family. He built the Ark to save his family and thousands of animals and replenish the earth. The consequences of this event are still visible today, as researchers have found dinosaur bones where they were washed up by the floods and buried under mud, sand, and rocks, fossilizing dinosaurs, animals, and plants (26) – a process that is possible if the criteria are met, and not by the passage of a considerable amount of time, as secular scientists claim (28). Many creationist scientists share this theory, claiming that there is plenty of evidence for the survival of dinosaurs in both the Bible and other historical chronicles, and, over the years, have accumulated ideas as to how Noah managed to place the dinosaurs in the Ark, as will be shown in the next chapter. Taylor summarizes and adapts them to his audience, explaining that Noah chose small or young specimens that could reasonably fit into the Ark and would be able to repopulate the earth once the catastrophe was over (32).

Finally, Taylor dedicates several pages to showing what happened to dinosaurs after the Flood. In particular, he claims that dinosaurs lived for several centuries after the Flood, though never in large numbers, even if researchers are still trying to figure out how or when they became extinct. Taylor claims this may have happened because Earth completely changed, with a temperature decrease that eventually led to a short Ice Age and a rise in water distribution

(34). Nevertheless, some exemplars survived, as testified by the numerous literature and artistic productions worldwide (36).

Over the years, *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* has received positive reviews from the evangelical community and have become bestsellers and must-haves in family libraries. The book's success is due to several aspects, such as the understandable language and the short and simple explanations that make it easy for children to learn about these creatures. In particular, many creationist reviewers pointed out how Taylor's book practically helps young children understand God's plan and defend themselves from a world full of atheistic misinformation that insists humanity originated from nothing, that there is no God, and that criticizes alternative theories. For example, a reviewer explained:

> When one criticizes this book it is no doubt because they don't understand that many Christian children are being fed disinformation in school, on tv and in movies. The book clearly explains (and proves) that dinosaurs did indeed exist after the flood and were not unknown to the writers of the Bible. It is not a book per se about evolution, but works well as a companion to the subject. Once we realize that dinosaurs are not as old as we're often told, the theory of macro-evolution is shown to be just that--- a theory, with no secure basis in factual history. I have owned a copy of this book since 1989 and frequently use it as a teaching aid, its bountiful illustrations rivet children's attention. But it is also helpful for teens and adults who question the historical accuracy of the Sacred Scriptures (ThriftBooks).

Offering simple, faith-based explanations about dinosaurs and their connection to biblical events, the book helps young readers understand young earth creationism, providing important pseudoscientific elements in support of this theory, such as a detailed description of the Flood, which goes beyond the elements provided in the Bible, and the process of fossilization, which differs from the "secular" perception of this phenomenon. However, the strength points that creationists emphasize are also the secular community's concerns. For example, Reyna Collura, probably not a buyer but a victim of this ideological system, wrote while reviewing this book on Amazon:

> In the early 1990s, I remember checking out the first edition of this book from my school's library multiple times, looking for answers to questions that bothered me. The school was affiliated with the WELS church, a small, conservative young-earth creationist Lutheran denomination concentrated in Wisconsin (USA).

> The attitudes toward science found in this book matched those fed to me by the teachers at this school and set me back about a decade in my education. Despite my natural curiosity, love of learning, and lifelong fascination with prehistory, the evasion, denial, and misrepresentation of basic geological facts left me academically crippled. I was totally confused about the scientific method, and entering public high school couldn't wrap my head around how classmates could draw conclusions with confidence from their experiments because I had been taught that it was all subject and there was always a an unknowable mystery to creation.
> I might have gone into a STEM field or at least opened up more educational opportunities for myself if I'd had a decent primary education that didn't, as this book does, portray scientists as as conspirators and the study of the remote past as little more than an amusing diversion.
>
> If you love your kids (or students) if you want them to thrive in life and thrill at the wonders of this world, please don't let them anywhere near this book or any doctrine that promotes an "us against them" mindset or gaslights them into believing that anyone outside the church is either duped or lying to them. It's sick and damaging, and if they ever figure it out, they will resent you forever. Let them figure out what they believe on their own terms once they've learned to think for themselves. The only reason not to is if you're afraid early indoctrination is the only way they will accept these ideas, and what does that say about your faith if you don't believe that a free-thinking adult would accept it? (Amazon)

In conclusion, Taylor's *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* is a children's literature classic that, since its first edition, has been read and loved by young creationist readers. With its simple yet detailed explanations and colorful illustrations, many children learned about young earth creationism while also understanding why "secular" sources are unreliable. Despite appearing as a harmless book, *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* still aims to reinforce pseudoscientific beliefs in young children to shape and alter their worldview forever, as seen with Reyna Collura's story.

4.2.2 Time Travelling and Christian Apologetics: *The Truth Chronicles*

The theme of conservative isolation and creationist propaganda is also addressed in *The Truth Chronicles*, a series of books co-authored by Tim Chaffey, founder of Midwest Apologetics, which focuses on defending the Bible, and a well-known evangelical speaker, and Joe Westbrook, a lab information manager at the VA Central Iowa Health Care Department. The series, published between the first half of the 2010s and 2021, is a collection of ten books, with the final one serving as a comprehensive guide to the characters and story. Published by Risen

Books (Portland, Oregon) and brought to life through the illustrations of Christian manga artist Melissa Mathis ("Inkhana"), the story follows a group of four teenagers (Jax, Izzy, JT, and Micky) during their years at Silicon Valley Prep, a high school specializing in science, technology, and innovation. The main themes revolve around proselytizing and biblical apologetics, guiding readers to defend their faith with sound reasoning and a contemporary – but no less bigoted – argument.

Although the series has four protagonists, the writers focus mainly on Jax and JT, leaving Izzy and Micky as supporting characters. The decision to place two white protagonists at the center of the story is not easy to understand or contextualize, mainly because of its inevitably racist nature. One hypothesis that can be put forward is to present protagonists with whom everyone can identify, as the vast majority of creationists are white, but it is puzzling why the non-white characters, in particular, are the most rational and resistant to creationism as if to echo the image of the white savior of centuries past. For example, Micky will take center stage later in the novels as the only character still holding to evolutionist beliefs and her story will teach readers a valuable lesson about God's plan.

Jaxon Thompson, or Jax to his friends, is the son of one of America's most famous scientists, Dr. Jeff Thompson, known for his brilliant mind and extraordinary discoveries. In his childhood, Jax was a believer actively involved in his community and participating in church activities. However, two and a half years before the story begins, Dr. Thompson dies in an explosion in his laboratory. Jax is completely devastated and, from that moment on, will always blame God for his loss. At the beginning of the first book, Jax is working on his father's research into time travel, specifically, the construction of a time machine. With the help of Izzy, his best friend and assistant, Jax wants to convert a car into a working time machine to display at the school science fair. Unable to travel millions of years into the past to see dinosaurs, the two friends decide to travel to ancient Egypt for a school assignment, but something very different awaits them there: dinosaurs. From that moment on, Jax experiences a personal struggle that eventually leads him to regain his faith. His personal story of reconnecting with God will be at the center of the series and will be so powerful that it will involve his best friends.

Isaiah Weber, or Izzy for short, is an African American teenager and Jax's best friend since seventh grade. He is a mathematical genius who helps Jax with all the calculations he needs for his time machine. In the story, Izzy, although he does not play a groundbreaking role, will also convert to Christianity, convinced above all by what he has experienced during the time travels. He usually teams up with Micky, one of the two girls in the group.

Micky Simmons is a half-Indian teenager who works with JT to work on their science fair project, a hoverboard. Micky is an evolutionist who has never read the Bible and does not convert to Christianity even when she sees the dinosaurs and people living in the 'wrong' age. Her strong opposition to Christianity is used to explain to the audience the stubbornness of evolutionists, even in front of evidence. However, she feels alienated from her friends and fakes a heartfelt conversion and interest in the biblical worldview[9]. Eventually, she will convert to Christianity, demonstrating that even the most obstinate evolutionists can find salvation in God's words.

JT Bankers, the "cute brunette with the pigtails sitting a few rows up" (Chaffey and Westbrook, *The Time Machine* 10), is the only Christian in the group. Throughout the series, JT often prays to God for guidance and help in difficult situations and answers her friends' questions about the Bible. She spends most of her adventures with Jax, her ex-boyfriend, and they vastly discuss the Bible and creationism. As a character, she is dynamic and constantly participates in adventurous and athletic activities such as rock climbing and hiking and Christian activities such as Bible study groups.

These books fit into a genre that combines science fiction, adventure, and *Bildungsroman*. Throughout the series, the characters experience various adventures as they travel through time and space with Jax's time machine and experience both personal and spiritual growth.

Despite the adaptation to the biblical worldview, the scientific themes contain various facets and references to popular culture. For example, at the beginning of the first book, the characters create two objects – a hoverboard and a time machine – alluding to the "Back to the Future" trilogy (1985-1990): "I guess we should have told you guys sooner. After all, you did give us the idea. [...] Remember when you and Izzy insisted that we watch those old Back to the Future movies with you?" (*The Time Machine*, 12). Moreover, not only is the story set in 2015, as in "Back to the Future Part II" (1989), but also the time machine is an old car, like Doc Brown's DeLorean.

The group often discusses science, technology, and the environment throughout the series. In the sixth book of the saga, *The Ark*, for example, the group discusses the Ice Age and global warming:

[9] "*Maybe I could get Jax and JT off my back about the whole God thing by acting like I agree with them. That would make them happy, and we wouldn't always argue about it. I guess youth group was pretty cool—and that drummer sure was cute*." [italics in original] (*The Rescue* 62).

“Only one ice age?” Micky asked. “Did they come up with that just because they have to squeeze all the evidence for the ice ages into a short time period?”

“No, actually it is very consistent with the Bible and the scientific data.” JT pulled her hood off her head. “Let’s think this through. What would need to happen in order to start an ice age?”

“Global warming,” Micky said.

“Yeah, that’s what we’ve been taught,” JT said.

“But why would global warming cause an ice age?” Izzy paced. “Because if the ice around Greenland and the North Pole keeps melting, then it could shut down the jet stream in the North Atlantic. Since the jet stream helps keep Europe and North America warm, shutting it down could lead to an ice age.”

[...]

JT giggled. “Let’s see if I can remember how this works.” She tipped her head slightly to the side. “Scientists have run computer models on the changing temperatures to see what could trigger an ice age. They have had to raise the average temperature by as much as fifty degrees Fahrenheit in some models just to get them to work.”

“Does anyone really think it will get that much warmer?” Jax asked.

“Not that I’ve heard,” JT said.

“But what about all the extra carbon dioxide that we’re putting into the atmosphere, and all the other greenhouse gases?” Micky asked.

“It seems like those things can contribute to slight changes in global temperatures, but we’ve really had very little impact on climate change,” JT said. “I’ll show you. Why is it that so many people say that man is causing global warming?”

“Like I just said, because of all the greenhouse gases caused by cars and factories and stuff.”

“That’s what most people think,” JT said. “But if it’s our industries and automobiles that are causing the warming, what caused it to be so warm during the Medieval Warm Period?”

[...]

“What’s the Little Ice Age?” Jax asked.

“It wasn’t a true ice age,” JT said. “But it was a period of about three to four hundred years of generally cooler weather that followed the Medieval Warm Period. In fact, the Thames River in London used to freeze over in winter during this time and they would have a festival every year. I think they called it the Frost Fair or something like that. But that stopped at the end of the Little Ice Age.”

“So you don’t think man has been causing global warming?” Micky asked.

JT shook her head. “Not really. I mean, it’s possible that we’re responsible for a little bit of the change. But the Medieval Warm Period and Little Ice Age both took place before the

> Industrial Revolution—long before cars and factories were putting all those greenhouse gases in the air—and the climate changed much more drastically during those times than it has now."
> [...]
>
> "It isn't like the Bible comes out and says, 'During this time there was an ice age.' So I can't give you a chapter and verse to prove it."
> [...]
>
> "Actually, global warming is part of the cause, but in a much different way than you think," JT said. "In order for an ice age to start, you need two major things to happen and, as far as we know, only a worldwide flood can provide both at the same time." (*The Ark* 26-30)

This negationist position not only perfectly aligns with other creationists' conservative positions but also normalizes and teaches it to a new generation of creationists. Global warming has been a scientific and political debate topic in recent years, with governments worldwide having passed laws and taken preventative measures to combat this phenomenon. However, this issue does not seem to worry or scare creationists. Indeed, the position advocated by JT regarding Scripture is prevalent among evangelicals. For example, in his article in "Answers Magazine," Ken Ham claims that climate change is to be expected in a world corrupted by sin and describes five periods of change in the earth's history: "Groaning Creation" (from when God created the world to the Fall), "Global Flood," "Cooling Earth" (as described in the Book of Job, the temperature of the earth decreased, leading to an Ice Age that lasted about 500 years), "Warming Earth," and "Day of the Lord" (described in the Second Epistle of Peter[10]). In particular, the "Day of the Lord" will be the final phase in which the earth will go up in flames, and God will create a new earth and heaven for Christians (Answers in Genesis).

As for Christianity and creationism, the characters discuss many topics related to the Bible and the biblical worldview, using contemporary arguments to debunk accusations of bigotry, which is mentioned between Jax and Micky but takes a different turn than expected.

> Micky dropped the drill on the table and pressed her hands to her head. "Ugghhh ... I just can't believe how narrow-minded you Christians are."
>
> "Micky, I'm not the one being narrow-minded."
>
> "What are you talking about?"
>
> "Let me ask you a question. What do you think happens to a person when they die?"

[10] "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." (2 Peter 3:10).

She bit her lip and hesitated. “I would say that I don’t know and that we can’t know. I don’t think there’s really anything beyond this life. We probably just get buried and rot in the ground. But I guess if there is a God, and if there’s a heaven, then He would let everyone in because He loves everyone.”

“Now that sounds narrow-minded.”

“How can you say that?”

“Because you don’t even give someone an option. According to you, if there is no God, then everyone rots. If there is a God, then everyone goes to heaven. That’s narrow-minded. At least with Christianity you have two options—heaven or hell.” (*The Rescue* 61-62)

Bigotry has always been one of the most well-known stereotypes about evangelicals, but, here, the writers decide to counter such claims by showing that they are not the ones with closed minds. Later in the book, JT and Jax discuss the origin of ethnicities, and, again, it is shown that evolutionists are bigoted, narrow-minded people:

“You said that Eve was the mother of all the living. Well, if that’s true, then that would mean that we are all related, right?”

“Right.”

Jax shrugged his shoulders. “Then where did the different races come from? I mean, Izzy is African American. Micky’s mom is from India and her dad is Caucasian. But you’re saying that we’re all related.”

JT nodded. “Yeah, if we all come from Adam and Eve, then we would have to be. Besides, like we just talked about, even the evolutionists say that we all go back to a common ancestor, so it’s pretty hypocritical if they attack the Bible on this point.”

[…]

“Oh yeah. Where were we?”

He jumped off the curb. “I think you were just getting started. You said that both creationists and evolutionists agree that we have a common ancestor, but that they disagree on several points.”

“Right. Um, well, obviously there are huge differences between the two views. The Bible teaches that we are all descendants of Adam and Eve. Well, also of Noah and his wife, too. The evolutionary belief is that we all go back to a group of ape-like ancestors and way beyond that to a single cell. Actually, if you think about it, the evolutionary view is quite racist.”

“Racist? How?”

"Because it teaches that some people groups are more closely related to the apes than others. I'm not saying that all evolutionists are racists. I'm sure most of them aren't, but their theory is.

"Besides, I don't like using the term races to refer to people because there's really only one race —humans. That's why I said people groups."

"Alright, so how does the Bible explain the different people groups?"

[...]

"[...] The Bible says that after the Flood the people gathered together and started building the tower. They were supposed to spread throughout the world, but they disobeyed God. So God made them speak different languages. Since they couldn't communicate, they couldn't work together, so they went their separate ways."

[...]

"Most of the people probably had middle brown skin. Then, when they split up, those who were better suited to their new environments were able to survive. For example, if you've got a group that moved near the Equator, where it's hot and sunny for much of the year, the lighter-skinned people probably wouldn't survive as well. They might get skin cancer and be gone within a few generations. This would leave only the darker-skinned people in that area."

[...]

"Well, you remember basic biology. If you take two middle brown people, who have the genetic variability for light and dark skin, and they have kids, what color of skin will their kids have?"

[...]

Jax shook his head.

"What's the matter?'

"I just wish they would teach us this in school. It makes so much more sense." (14; 68-72)

The topics discussed, which are only partially reproduced here, are meant to show, and their dialogical form perfectly manages to do so, that it is possible to reach the truth in God through conversation. This new technique, as seen in documentaries, modernizes creationism, especially attracting younger people who do not have to engage with complicated scientific articles that are not accessible to them. Moreover, it also elevates its position to a more credible theory, which only partially relies on the Bible.

As the previous chapter has shown, one possible cause for such commitment in literature is creationists' persistence and need for public recognition. Over the years, creationism has evolved, adopting a more scientific approach to be recognized as such, but it

considers only the features that the Scripture can confirm. Consequently, the result is a pseudoscience aimed at partially or entirely replacing evolutionism in schools. As mentioned earlier, this plan is extremely dangerous because people who do not have access to other materials or are not well taught in science and its related subjects fall into this trap, forgetting that actual science requires methods and evidence based on factual events and not on a religious book. If this problem is not addressed, it will lead to an endless cycle in the future where children grow up to be misinformed adults who use the same methods to educate their children or, if they are lucky, grow up to be a Reyna Collura and think that they are not functioning adults because they did not receive a proper education. Nonetheless, evangelicals' tools have quickly adapted to the marketplace by creating *ad hoc* materials based on their interests and needs. This deep devotion has consequences that can already be observed. For example, a 2019 Gallup poll reported data showing that most Protestants (56%) and those who go to church at least once a week (68%) believe that God created man in his present form (Brenan). Although they are a minority in the American panorama, creationists are dangerous, and this issue needs to be addressed before it is too late.

4.2.3 Biblical Adventures: *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls*

Time-traveling adventures are also at the core of *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls*, a book series by M. J. Thomas (1969) between 2017 and 2020, published by WorthyKids, a division of Hachette Book Group (HBG, 2006). The series is divided into two thematic bundles: the "Old Testament Bundle" (*The Beginning*, *Race To The Ark*, *The Great Escape*, *Journey to Jericho*, and *The Lion's Roar*) and the "New Testament Bundle" (*The King is Born*, *Miracles By The Sea*, and *The Final Scroll*) that tell the adventures of siblings Peter and Mary, and their dog, Hank, as they discover ancient scrolls that transport them back to key moments in biblical history. The series was created as an alternative and engaging way to teach the Bible and is aimed at elementary school children between six and nine.

The characters in the series can be divided into three groups based on their role in the story: the protagonists (Peter, Mary, and Hank), the mentors or helpers (Great-Uncle Solomon and Michael), and the antagonists (Satan and his henchmen).

Peter and Mary are siblings with only one year difference and share a close relationship with ups and downs. The youngest, Peter, is adventurous and down-to-earth and prefers acting rather than planning and thinking. He is very protective of Mary and has taught Hank curious tricks, such as how to tell the time. Although he is less brilliant than his sister, his approach to

the missions and the puzzles of the scrolls is extremely valuable. Mary, on the other hand, a Chinese adoptee, is the brains of the duo. She knows many things that she has learned from reading and studying in her spare time, but she is also proficient in martial arts – her only stereotyped trait. As a duo, the siblings complement each other, and despite some quarrels, they work together to solve the mystery of the scrolls. Moreover, their names refer directly to the Apostle Peter and the Virgin Mary, with whom they share some characteristics, such as personality. Peter is indeed known as the most zealous follower of Jesus but also the most impulsive, while Mary is usually described as quieter and gentler. Finally, as their adventures become more complex, the children can rely on two adult characters: Great-Uncle Solomon and Archangel Michael.

Great-Uncle Solomon is a retired archeologist who has spent his career collecting and examining ancient artifacts to prove the inerrancy of the Bible. He traveled the world and stored these finds in his home, which soon became a museum. In his collection, in a secret room, there is an ancient jar containing mysterious scrolls that he could not read. Although Solomon does not participate in the children's adventures, he reads and discusses the Bible with the siblings or shows them his collection of artifacts. As Solomon is an eccentric character, many reviewers have compared him to Professor Digory Kirke from CS Lewis' (1898-1963) *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956).

On the other hand, Micheal is an archangel of the Judeo-Christian tradition known for battling Satan in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament (12:7-12). Throughout the story, he appears at the beginning of each book to rehearse the rules of adventure and when the children need him most. In addition, he never lets the children fight Satan directly but takes care of him personally. His characterization is simplified for the audience, but his physical appearance, represented only by the illustrations, resembles the most famous work of art dedicated to him: tall, blond hair, and Caucasian.

Finally, the main villain of the series is Satan, a former angel whose task is to corrupt and destroy everything God has created. Like Micheal, Satan is also oversimplified, probably so as not to frighten the children. Although he does not canonically appear in all the stories in the Bible, Satan plays a crucial role in luring the children away from God, both in his serpent and humanoid forms. To deceive the children, he uses various methods, especially words, a characteristic he also has in the original text. In *The Beginning*, for example, he meets the children as a friend who wants to help them solve the scrolls. However, when Mary mentions God, Satan changes his attitude.

Mary nodded. “That’s true. There are three words, and we already have the first word.”

“What is it?” asked the snake.

“The first word is GOD,” said Mary. “Do you know anything about God?”

‘“I know a lot about God,” said the snake. “I know God hasn’t been around here in a long, long time.”

“Yes, he has,” said Peter. “I just heard God in the garden this morning.”

The snake stuck out his tongue and whipped it back in. “You couldn’t have. God has nothing to do with this place or any of the creatures.”

“That’s not true.” Mary pointed around the garden. “God made the world and all these creatures.”

“You must be confused,” said the snake. “This world has always been here. God didn’t make any of these creatures.”

“Yes, God did,” said Peter.

“How can you be sure?” asked the snake.

“I saw it happen!” (*The Beginning* 79-80)

Although the series does not initially take an overt stance on creationism, this first exchange is consistent with creationist thought with the one in Race to the Ark, in which he quotes Nietzsche’s famous “God is dead.” As the story progresses, however, Satan becomes less of a villain resembling his biblical version and more of a classical villain from children’s stories, using catchphrases and henchmen to fight the children.

Creationism is not “bombed” as much as in the other products analyzed in this thesis, but this is probably due to the target audience, which is younger than the one for *The Truth Chronicles*. The book would probably scare the children with its difficulty, so they learn while engaging with the environment and the adventures they live. For example, to solve the scroll and return to the present, children must solve a puzzle that requires their cooperation and an understanding of what happens during their adventure. In addition to creationism and biblical inerrancy, the book also explores different themes, such as time travel and personal and spiritual growth, which aligns it with the *Bildungsroman*.

Regarding time travel, Thomas’ method is easy to remember: each journey takes seven days, except in *The Great Escape*, where the children have fourteen days. The number seven appears frequently in Scripture and is associated with various stories and events, such as God’s rest on the seventh day and its sanctification (Genesis 2:2-3), Jacob’s seven years of service with Laban (Genesis 29:20-35), Pharaoh’s dreams of seven fat and seven lean oxen (Genesis 41:17-41), the seven-day siege of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27), and the seven churches, seven spirits,

seven stars, and seven seals mentioned in Revelation (Easton). However, unlike other time travel stories, the time spent in each story corresponds to almost no time in the present.

The themes of the *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, include personal and spiritual growth. At the beginning of their journey, the children only have a basic knowledge of the Bible, but the more they experience the stories, the more they are drawn into Christianity, including through the challenges presented by the scrolls. Their personal growth consists of working as a team, knowing each other's strengths and weaknesses, and respecting the rules. However, this development is not linear and is not easy to achieve. For example, many times, Peter almost reveals his identity, and Mary rolls her eyes when her brother knows nothing or acts recklessly.

As for *The Truth Chronicles*, the story consists mainly of dialog, but unlike Chaffey and Westbrook's series, they are not aimed at proselytizing or discrediting secular philosophies and science. *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls*, aimed at young children, takes a more subtle approach, combining funny moments with biblical inerrancy. However, creationists have not always appreciated or understood Thomas's approach. For example, many mothers in their blogs were worried about some features of the books that were not entirely consistent with their biblical worldview. Some were concerned about the presence of Satan as a recurring villain, which differs from the original version of Scripture, while others pointed out that the words of Jesus are not the same as in the Gospel. Minor changes were necessary to adapt the story to its audience, and Thomas ensured that adults would notice them. In fact, at the end of each book, there is a chapter entitled "Do you want to read more about the events in this story?" in which Thomas asks readers to look for the original story in the Bible and, if necessary, also explains any changes he made when writing the book. For example, in *The Great Escape*, Thomas writes:

> The people, places, and events in *The Great Escape* [italics in original] are drawn from the stories in the Bible. You can read more about them in the following passages of the Bible.
>
> **Exodus chapters 1 and 2** [bold in original] tell the story of Egypt's oppression of Israel, the birth of Moses, and the Israelites' cry to God for help.
>
> **Exodus chapters 3 and 4** tell of God speaking to Moses from a burning bush and sending him to lead the people out of Egypt.
>
> **Exodus chapters 5-12** tell about Pharaoh's refusal to let the Israelites go and the ten plagues God sent to Egypt.
>
> **Exodus chapter 12** describes the first Passover and the Exodus from Egypt.
>
> **Exodus chapter 13** tells how God led the Israelites with a pillar of cloud and fire.

> **Exodus chapter 14** tells the story of the crossing of the Red Sea.
> Special Notes:
> 1. Princess Shephara is a fictional character who represents the many daughters of pharaohs who would go on to become queens and pharaohs.
> 2. Events in The Great Escape have been condensed from the events presented in the book of Exodus (n.p.).

In conclusion, *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls*, while not always an overtly creationist series, offers an age-appropriate introduction to the Bible and its inerrancy, balancing entertainment and spiritual lessons without overloading readers with excessive information and allowing children to understand God's design at their own pace. Moreover, the choice to use a more subtle approach to creationism may, in the future, help them place their works in "secular" institutions and mainline churches. Compared with *The Truth Chronicles*, *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls* better aligns with their less aggressive stance when interacting with evolutionists outside their safe environment. On the other hand, *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* places itself in the middle, offering an exhaustive description of young earth creationism while using an accessible language. Despite their differences, all three books help to shape children's minds, teaching them about God's intelligent design, defending their faith, not trusting "secular" theories, and creating a solid base for the future of creationism.

CHAPTER 5
CREATIONIST MUSEUMS

5.1 Creationist Museums: What Are They?

Over the years, creationists have chosen to build museums rather than more traditional institutions such as churches or Bible schools for several reasons: first, museums have always been considered centers of scientific research and public education; second, museums provide a high entertainment value, which is especially important because it is believed that people, especially children, learn more effectively when they are having fun; and finally, museums provide a direct way to communicate with the public, bypassing the need to seek approval from established scientists or government agencies that would be necessary in discussions (Duncan 121-122).

While a commitment to young-earth creationism unites the museums examined in this chapter, each was founded with different motivations: Henry Morris wanted to legitimize creation science with his Museum of Creation and Earth History and, later, the Discovery Center for Science & Earth History, while Ken Ham wanted to bring creationism into the cultural mainstream with his Creation Museum and Ark Encounter (109). These different motivations are reflected in their exhibition techniques, even if their strategies and goals are remarkably similar, such as cultivating a scientific atmosphere in their exhibitions using historical artifacts, animatronics, charts, graphics, and a central focus on "scientific research" to reassure Christians that creationism is scientifically valid, possibly more so than evolution. These museums tell the visitors that there is a real scientific debate about evolution between equally qualified scientists rather than between religious and scientific viewpoints (111). Creation museums exploit this, encouraging visitors to trust their morally sound expertise while portraying evolutionists as ethically corrupt, thus undermining their scientific credibility (110). The emphasis on scientific legitimacy is further emphasized by the museums' focus on the credentials of their founders and collaborators. The Institute for Creation Research (ICR, 1970), for example, often emphasizes the high scientific qualifications of its scientists and implies that their work, which comes from "real" scientists, is also "real" science. Similarly, Answers in Genesis (AiG) emphasizes that many PhD scientists were consulted to ensure the scientific accuracy of their exhibits. This reliance on scientific references is consistent with Americans' tendency to trust views that align with science and technology. Many museums also criticize

mainstream scientists for their perceived stubbornness and elitism, which only underscores the misrepresentation of evolution and related scientific disciplines by museum curators (111).

The impact of creationist museums on science is considerable and somewhat disturbing, especially because of their careful selection of elements that support their thesis or are seen as weak points of evolutionist reasoning. First, creationist museums attempt to redefine science by incorporating old observation methods, most of which lack objectivity or use circular reasoning (112). This naturalistic and superstitious approach to science must ultimately be reconciled with biblical narratives and remove the open-ended nature central to scientific discourse. Second, these museums attempt to establish a rigid dichotomy between evolution and creationism (120). They promote the idea that any evidence that argues against evolution necessarily argues for creationism and teach visitors that unresolved scientific questions or debates within the scientific community are evidence of the flaws of evolution and, thus, confirmation of creationist views (121).

However, natural history museums have been active, and, especially in the early 21st century, many museum curators and scientists have written articles against them. Gretchen Jennings, for example, editor until the fall of 2014 of "Exhibitionist," a journal of museum exhibition theory and practice published by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM), agrees in her article "Creationist 'Museums' Are Not Museums" that the rise of creationist museums has sparked a valuable discussion among museum professionals, but that they do not fit the traditional definition of a museum. Creationist museums are more about what they lack – a connection to human knowledge and scientific understanding – than what they contain. Historically, museums have evolved and adapted to recent technologies and discoveries, but their definition has not changed (72). Museums must preserve and communicate human heritage and knowledge, unlike creationist museums, which attempt to combine science and faith fundamentally differently from other museums with religious exhibits, such as the Vatican Museum or the National Museum of the American Indian (73). Furthermore, Jennings emphasizes that while discussing the cultural impact of creationist museums is essential, they are not trusted to develop new ideas about what a museum should be, except perhaps as a negative example (74).

Despite the criticism, creationist museums play a fundamental role in shaping and modernizing the American creation movement. As Duncan argues in her dissertation, "Faith Displayed as Science: The Role of the 'Creation Museum' in the Modern American Creationist Movement" (2009), not only do these museums represent a broader trend in the creationist movement that has turned away from high-profile efforts to formally recognize and incorporate

creationism into the classroom (books, documentaries, online platforms, etc.), but they also blur the lines between religion and science by framing the debate not as a conflict between religion and science, but as a conflict between two competing sciences (Duncan 127).

However, despite their growing significance in the new millennium, scholarly research on creationist museums remains limited. Consequently, this chapter draws upon information from the official websites of these museums and two authors who had the chance to visit these institutions.

5.2 Creation Museum and Ark Encounter: "Prepare to Believe"

The Creation Museum and the Ark Encounter are patronaged by Answers in Genesis (AiG, 1994), an apologetics organization, and its founder, Ken Ham, an Australian creationist who moved to California in 1987 (Duncan 85).

After its foundation, Answers in Genesis quickly gained notoriety, mainly due to its accessibility and Ham's radio program "Answers... with Ken Ham," which reached over 85,500 people in 1994 alone (86). The following year, in 1995, Answers in Genesis launched its website, which offers free downloads of radio files and educational PowerPoint presentations, access to Ken Ham's blog, scholarly articles, and a variety of creationist materials, including textbooks and DVDs, most of which are published directly by AiG (87). Answers in Genesis communicates with its audience also through physical magazines, such as the famous "Answers," which emphasizes a biblical worldview and literal applications of the Scripture, with articles on origins from both a biblical and scholarly perspective. In January 2008, the AiG decided to expand this series online, creating the "Answers Research Journal" (ARJ), which is dedicated to research from the perspective of the young earth and the global flood (89). Moreover, AiG sponsors trips to the Grand Canyon and the Holy Land and hosts an annual "Creation College" in northern Kentucky that features five days of lectures by Ham and other creation scientists (88). In 2020, Answers in Genesis launched Answers.tv, a Christian alternative to other streaming platforms such as Netflix and Disney+ (Klett).

Since the foundation of AiG, Ham desired to open a large creationist museum for visitors nationwide; consequently, he chose Northern Kentucky as the location for its strategic position, knowing that almost all of the U.S. population was within a day's drive. However, the realization of the project only started in the mid-1990s and would be completed at the beginning of the new millennia (91). The two museums not only did (and do) attract visitors nationwide but also undesired media attraction and ended up being the media's target for years, concerned

about the misleading teachings they spread and the financial aspects of the project, particularly a tax rebate provided by the state of Kentucky. Particularly, Barry W. Lynn (1948), the executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (AU, 1948) at the time, contended that tax facilitations for religious projects are inappropriate, asserting that religious groups should be funded by voluntary donations rather than government support. However, his position was not shared by Bill Sharp, an attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky, who responded that such tax exemptions are applied constitutionally without discrimination, even to religious facilities (Alford). Even Edwin Kagin (1940-2014), the former National Legal Director of American Atheists, agreed with Sharp, noting that these benefits are essential to support tourism (Lovan). On the other hand, others questioned the validity of such institutions' teachings, worried that they could influence or mislead children. One of the most famous speeches was made by Bill Nye (1955) only a few days after the grand opening of Ark Encounter. World-renowned for his program "Bill Nye the Science Guy," the science communicator expressed his strong disapproval, arguing that such presentations undermine critical thinking, especially among the numerous school children visiting the site (Ortiz). Despite the negative media coverage, the museums do not appear to be affected, as demonstrated by the increasing number of visitors claimed by Ken Ham and the AiG in various interviews.

5.2.1 Creation Museum

The Creation Museum offers families an opportunity to explore Earth's history as depicted in the Bible through numerous activities and interactive exhibitions inside and outside its building. The museum, located in Petersburg, emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's word, and not human assumptions, to analyze and study our world. Here, visitors are encouraged to explore the Bible and gain a deeper understanding of God's creation, learn about various scientific disciplines, and analyze facts and arguments from a biblical perspective (Answer in Genesis). The centerpiece of the Creation Museum is an exhibit called the "Seven C's" (Creation, Corruption, Catastrophe, Confusion, Christ, Cross, and Consummation), which covers almost all of the museum, on both its floors, a chronological journey through biblical history that makes visitors travel back in time, beginning with creation and continuing to the Second Coming of Christ, and learn how the Bible answers complex questions about science, Scripture, and personal faith (Creation Museum).

The first room is dedicated to Genesis, particularly Genesis 2-3, in which Adam and Eve live in the Garden of Eden. The scene is idyllic, with Adam naming animals and the couple lounging by the water. However, a serpent is hanging menacingly on the visitors' heads, foreshadowing the Fall of Man. Slowly, the exhibit turns darker and shows Eve offering Adam some fruit from the Tree of Knowledge – not the traditional red apple, but red-colored berries – stained as if with blood, an allusion to Eve's more significant role (and guilt) in the Fall. This particular reconstruction leads to the "Cave of Sorrows," which focuses exclusively on "Corruption," the second "C" (Thomas 44). Here, the theme of global suffering caused by sin is deepened with images and sounds of catastrophe, war, and death, culminating in a suffocating atmosphere. As visitors leave the "Cave of Sorrows," they witness the first blood sacrifice and Cain's murder of Abel, symbols of humanity's corruption after the Fall. Then, the exhibition moves on to the Flood, crucial in supporting and showing the museum's creationist narrative and attempting to fill the gaps in the original biblical narrative. For example, some displays add information about the Ark, claiming that specialized builders helped Noah in its construction, despite the Bible stating that the Ark was built only by Noah and his family (45). This specific aspect may have been altered to appear more believable to visitors or to convince a more skeptical audience.

Moreover, "The Journey of the Ark" exhibit includes a diorama showing the Ark descending into the floods while the people cling desperately to the mountaintops, hoping for salvation. Before continuing with the leading exhibition, some displays refute the theory of evolution and old earth geology in favor of creationism and young earth geology. These ideas are further developed in the fourth "C" pavilion, with a reconstruction of the Tower of Babel story used to explain the origin of different languages, cultures, and ethnicities. This display, in particular, shows visitors Nazi memorabilia to reinforce the negative consequences of Darwinism, often linked by creationists to racism and eugenics. The last three "C" (Christ, Cross, and Consummation), the most important for Christians and Christianity, are somehow cut short and summarized by a single poster each. However, this does not bother visitors: Answers in Genesis' goal is to demonstrate the literal truth of Genesis, the most crucial part of the Scriptures (46).

Finally, the Creation Museum offers many exhibitions tailored for a broad audience with different interests. The first, added in 2013, is the "Dragon Legends" exhibition, which can be found near the museum's main hall. This exhibition introduces visitors to the AiG's unique perspective on dinosaurs, explaining how dinosaurs were not only boarded in the Ark but also present in many works of literature, even if they were referred to as "dragons." The

displays take the visitors to the main hall, where animatronics depict children playing with dinosaurs, through which it is possible to access the 4D theater and the Stargazer Planetarium (38). Visitors can enjoy "Dragons: Quest for Truth" at the theater, which is included with the Creation Museum admission ticket and illustrates the reality behind the myth of dragons. On the other hand, the planetarium, which tickets must be purchased at the Guest Services, explores the universe, explaining how the stars, planets, and galaxies proclaim God's glory and confirm the creation account in Genesis. The planetarium offers different shows, such as "Created Cosmos," on the immensity of the universe and the power of God, and "Aliens: Fact or Fiction?" which addresses questions about extraterrestrial life from a biblical perspective, inviting the audience to question whether humans are alone or if there is life on other planets, both from a scientific and a biblical perspective (Creation Museum).

This contrasting blending of science and religion constitutes an important topic for the Creation Museum and is present in many exhibitions. For example, at the "Graffiti Alley," visitors are introduced to the cultural decline Americans face caused by the rejection and abandonment of Scripture. This exhibit takes visitors through twisted alleyways, symbolizing the dangerous and unclear path of life without the Bible, and walls plastered with peeling magazine and newspaper covers featuring sensational headlines hinting at the dangers of secularization. Exiting "Graffiti Alley," visitors find themselves in front of the "Culture in Crisis" exhibit, represented by a suburban home. As if continuing the theme from the previous exhibit, "Culture in Crisis" portrays troubled families, both secularized and churchgoers, where each member is caught in self-destructive behavior (Thomas 42). The aim of this scene is almost apparent: reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes and suggesting that these issues arise from a departure from biblical roles. However, there is still hope: from the shattered foundations of the church, it is possible to restore order using young-earth creationist principles. After this disturbing exhibit, visitors are heartened by a short film about the six days of creation, emphasizing God's literal reading. Finally, "Wonders of Creation" showcases the marvels of God's world, including natural laws, the universe, and complexities such as the DNA and the cells. This exhibit can be seen as a continuation of the short film presented at the "Six Day Theater," as it reinforces everything visitors have already seen (43).

Moreover, the museum offers a unique experience for children, with activities that help them understand and accept the Bible using their favorite topics, such as dinosaurs. At the "Dig Display," indeed, children can observe how paleontologists work. However, despite using the same tools as secular scientists, the conclusions drawn by creationists differ: the Creation Museum acknowledges the cultural authority of science and seeks to lend its claims an air of

scientific credibility, but in the mock tent near the dig site, there is a Bible opened on Genesis 1 (39). These passages highlighted, which described the literal creation in six days, are used to support the idea that dinosaurs and animals were created on the same day, and their aspect does not differ from now. This emphasis reveals that the Creation Museum's theology is deeply rooted in presuppositional apologetics, a concept presented to visitors through a loop video (40).

Since its inauguration, the Creation Museum has been a popular destination for believers, especially families and younger generations ("Creation Museum," 00:02:14-00:02:57). The museum aims to provide information that often needs to be included in schools and other museums (00:03:04-00:04:45), and visitors accept AiG's worldview without much skepticism. However, according to Thomas, people occasionally seem doubtful about the arguments presented and prefer their own interpretations (Thomas 38).

Such criticism, coming from creationists themselves, strengthens the cause of science while also highlighting creationism's inherent status as pseudoscience, in which adherents are motivated by faith in religious doctrines rather than scientific reasoning. While creationism may not represent an immediate threat to the integrity of science, its potential impact on science education is less clear. For example, if creationists enroll their children in nearby public schools, this could influence teachers to avoid topics such as evolution and geology not to let them feel uncomfortable while reinforcing the creationist ideas of fundamentalist Christian homeschoolers, further deepening the divide between scientific knowledge and religious beliefs.

However, these beliefs are a double-edged sword. On the one hand, creationists bombard their followers with supernatural claims and present themselves as a legitimate alternative to the theory of evolution, in particular, attempting to convey a worldview that rejects scientific explanations for the origin of life in favor of creationist concepts that seem just as good, if not better. In modern times, however, this strategy is becoming increasingly unstable: in the current millennium, vast amounts of scientifically accurate knowledge are available via books, academic resources, and, probably most importantly, the internet – often for free. This popularization of knowledge makes it more difficult for creationists to maintain control of the narrative, meaning they need to take significant measures to protect their children from these alternative sources of information because even brief exposure to solid scientific content online could raise doubts and shatter the creationist worldview.

5.2.2 Ark Encounter

Ark Encounter, the Creation Museum's sister attraction, is a life reconstruction of Noah's Ark that promotes an entertaining and educational experience about the scientific accuracy of the Bible, particularly the Genesis Flood, and is a powerful tool for evangelism. This unique historical attraction is in Williamstown, Kentucky (Answer in Genesis).

The leading figure behind the Ark Encounter is the Chief Action Officer of Answers in Genesis and co-founder of the organization, Mike Zovath, whose role is transforming creative ideas into reality and ensuring that the projects are executed with a high standard of excellence. The Ark is a marvel of design, with a structure that meets modern building regulations and emphasizes sustainability, with Amish workers taking part in the project with their traditional building techniques ("Ark Encounter," 00:17:47-00:20:05).

Inside the Ark, the exhibits are divided into three floors, with the fourth offering a restaurant, accessible through centrally located ramps, almost to evoke the image of the animals boarding the Ark in the biblical story. Ark Encounter's exploration differs almost entirely from its sister attraction, offering more freedom of action to its visitors (Thomas 48).

The first level of the Ark offers different exhibitions, showing a panoramic of Noah's project and blending the different phases. For example, a diorama shows Noah offering sacrifices on an altar, followed by the reproduction of historically accurate cages and water systems filled with the sounds of different animals. Many of the cages contain models of the animals who lived in the Ark, but, sometimes, their representation is inaccurate, maybe to show that some of them got extinct over time. As in the Creation Museum, displays offer visitors an overview of God's creation, interpreted according to the young earth creationist perspective. Additionally, a series of posters emphasize the perfection and inclusivity of creation, even if the models of Adam and Eve represent Caucasian features (49). Finally, one of the displays addresses biblical inaccuracy, or, rather, King James Bible inaccuracy: the Ark never hosted unicorns as they are fictional creatures. To explain this mistake without undermining the Bible, the AiG experts explain that the Hebrew word "reem" does not mean "unicorn," but rather a creature with one horn similar to a rhinoceros (49-50).

On the other hand, the second floor of the Ark is dedicated to logistics problems, such as managing the animals. Displays explain to the visitors that since the Bible does not explain everything in detail, they had to adjust some details to make it more plausible. Some of their adjustments are creative, especially the refillable feeders or the automatic watering system, as if they wanted to demonstrate to visitors that ancient populations, at least before the Flood, were fully developed. To further support their thesis, the second flood also shows Noah's library,

which showcases shelves filled with scrolls, ink pots, pens, and a mannequin of Noah sitting at his desk (50). Moreover, some displays provide a backstory for Noah's skills, using the existence of Egyptian pyramids as evidence of this advanced technology. Finally, the second floor addresses the dangers of creative depictions of the Ark, as in children's books, arguing that such representations undermine the Bible and trivialize the reality of the biblical Flood.

The third and last floor of the Ark depicts the living quarters of Noah's family and explains the impact of the Flood (51). In Noah's headquarters, comfortable accommodations are shown, followed by displays highlighting the artistic license used by the builders, which does not contradict the Bible. Following this exhibit, visitors learn more about the consequences of the Flood, with displays offering detailed interpretations of flood geology that extend beyond biblical accounts. For example, one of the panels suggests that combining magma and seawater created enormous geysers that eventually caused a global rainstorm.

Finally, the Ark Encounter, as well as the Creation Museum, addresses the issue of race, claiming that the Bible does not promote racism but rather that all modern races descended from Noah's children – an idea highlighted by the mannequins of Noah's family that display different skin tones and physical traits (52).

In conclusion, while visiting the Ark Encounter, it becomes apparent that the Bible alone is insufficient to construct this exhibit: there are gaps in the biblical narrative that are difficult to fill without creative adjustment (53). Nevertheless, Ark Encounter answers common questions about the biblical narrative's relevance and offers arguments against the idea that natural selection supports Darwin's theory of evolution. Moreover, Answers in Genesis remains committed to using Ark Encounter as a platform to promote a creationist worldview and share the message of Christ (Answer in Genesis).

5.2.3 Children Activities

The Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum offer various educational programs designed to teach students about science through the lens of a biblical worldview. These include half-day seminars, experiential camps, and unique field trips outside the museum appropriate for any age group.

For children ages 5-10, "Explore Jr." half-day programs offer a morning of interactive learning with a biblical perspective, perfect for young people and their caregivers. Explore Junior 3-Day Summer Camps allow children (and their caregivers) to explore their favorite science topics while strengthening their understanding of a biblical worldview.

High schoolers and adults can also participate in these activities, with "Explore Days" offering half-day programs during which students can have hands-on experiences in science that combine biblical truths with scientific discovery. If interested, the museum also offers the "5-Day Camps" and "Lab Intensives," where students spend five days conducting experiments reinforcing the idea that science supports the Bible. Then, the museum offers "Exploration Programs" that cover various scientific topics from a biblical perspective and allow the discovery of God's creation outside the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum (Creation Museum).

5.3 The Institute for Creation Research (ICR): The Museum of Creation and Earth History and the Discovery Center for Science and Earth History

The Institute for Creation Research (ICR) was founded in 1972 by Dr. Henry M. Morris (1918-2006), following his split from the Creation Science Research Center (CSRC) over a disagreement over its statement of belief (Numbers 314-15). Morris believed the ICR should be the world's leading creation research institution, run and operated by scientists. Unlike his contemporaries who sought to remove the theory of evolution from public school curricula through legal action, Morris believed education, not legislation, was the best way to restore creation science to its rightful place (Duncan 61). Consequently, he focused on developing a program on literature, teaching, and research.

As the ICR gained influence, income from book sales, royalties, tuition fees, and donations made independent research possible. Today, the ICR operates a new "Academics and Research" building in Texas with faculty offices, classrooms, laboratories, and a library (62). The ICR's website promotes its image as America's leading creation science organization. However, it simultaneously requires all ICR employees to sign a statement of faith that includes claims that God created biological life and that the Bible is free from error (63).

In addition to the "Acts & Facts" magazine, the ICR has published many books and videos. Within ten years of its founding, it had published fifty-five books, of which over one million copies had been printed by 1981. One of the most famous was Morris's *Scientific Creationism* (1974), which became a fundamental textbook for the creationist movement. This book has two editions: a general edition and a public school edition, with the latter presenting scientific data without biblical or religious references, reflecting Morris's approach, which viewed creationism and evolution as competing scientific hypotheses (64). Moreover, the ICR offers educational programs that award certificates and degrees (65). The Creation Worldview

Professional Certificate Program allows students to complete an online degree in one year, while ICR's graduate school (ICRGS), initially located in San Diego, has offered a master's degree in science education since 1981. In 1988, ICRGS temporarily lost its accreditation in California and was not allowed to grant degrees after an investigative committee pointed out problems such as the small number of full-time professors, inadequate laboratory facilities, and the requirement for students to agree to ICR's statement of faith, which rejects evolution. Morris argued that the decision was discriminatory and claimed that the school's teachings were otherwise consistent with mainstream science courses. ICR eventually won a lawsuit against the California superintendent and was allowed to award degrees until 2007, when it moved to Dallas, Texas (66).

5.3.1 Museum of Creation and Earth History

The Museum of Creation and Earth History is dedicated to the literal interpretation of the six-day creation and a young earth, with an increasing emphasis on the presentation of God's plan of creation. The ICR initially founded the museum in 1992, but after its relocation to Texas, the ICR decided to sell it to the Life and Light Foundation, a non-profit ministry run by Tom Cantor.

Over the years, the ICR expanded and developed the museum's exhibits, intending to provide believers with scientific evidence for the accuracy and authority of the Bible. The Creation and Earth History Museum is committed to presenting science and history from a biblical perspective. The museum features a vast exhibit space highlighting a literal creation in six days and a young earth, with displays including a human anatomy exhibit, a life-size Tabernacle, and a cave on the age of the earth. The museum is 20 minutes east of downtown San Diego, California, and offers in-person and virtual tours (Creation & Earth History Museum).

5.3.1.1 Exhibitions

The museum's exhibits guide visitors through the biblical narrative of science and history, beginning with the creation account described in Genesis 1. Guests are invited to explore the significant events of biblical history, including humanity's rebellion against God, the worldwide Flood, the dispersion at Babel, the history of Israel and the Gentile nations, the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, and the ultimate fulfillment of God's plan for creation when

Christ will return. Many exhibits also show how contemporary scientific and historical evidence agrees with the biblical account (Creation & Earth History Museum). Moreover, the Creation and Earth History Museum features extensive signage, allowing people to visit each exhibition at their own pace and cover the entire museum before leaving (Duncan 68).

In the outside area of the museum, the exhibition starts with the "Dinosaur Play Area," where children play the role of paleontologists by sifting through sand to uncover detailed replicas of fossils at the excavation table, climbing on a *Tyrannosaurus* skeleton, or wondering the significance of soft tissue in dinosaur bones as seen in the giant replica of a *Sauropod* femur. Moreover, in the "Dinosaur Gardens," visitors can stroll through landscaped gardens with detailed sculptures of insects, mammals, and life-size dinosaurs, allowing visitors to imagine the world before the Flood. There are also live reptiles in the gardens, where guests can observe different species of turtles and participate in a feeding session. Finally, visitors will find "Dinosaurs and the Bible upon entering the museum." This exhibit features preserved soft tissue from a Triceratops horn and other fossils from the Hell Creek Formation in Montana, led by scientist Mark Armitage. This discovery, the first of its kind, is displayed alongside replicas of historical artifacts that point to human-dinosaur interaction (Creation & Earth History Museum).

The first room of the museum sets out its guiding philosophy and makes it clear that, unlike most other museums, the Creation and Earth History Museum does not hide its religious foundations, arguing that questions about the origins or age of the earth cannot be answered by scientific observation alone (Duncan 68). Therefore, the exhibits also draw on the Bible, suggesting that these methods are just as legitimate as those used by secular scientists, as the interpretation of data about the origins and history of the earth depends on one's worldview. In addition, the room displays a collage of scientific images to reinforce the idea that creationism is scientific, and it includes display boards defining science and religion, arguing that natural science is based on organized and factual observation and that evolution is not natural science (69). At the very end of this room is the "Acts of God – Day One" exhibit, which contains a series of panels interpreting the first chapter of Genesis as historical events. The next panel deals with the second day of creation and explains that when God speaks of a "vault of heaven" between the waters in the Bible, he is probably describing something that increases human life expectancy due to reduced exposure to harmful radiation and prevents the formation of radiocarbon in the atmosphere. These effects justify how certain biblical narratives might be scientifically plausible or argue that evolutionary science is flawed. For example, the greenhouse effect and reduced radiation are cited as explanations for the long lifespan of pre-

Flood figures, while the absence of atmospheric radiocarbon is cited as evidence that carbon dating is unreliable due to unknown variables in the original atmosphere. There is no scientific evidence for the existence of this vapor canopy beyond the biblical text. However, these hypothetical effects are presented confidently, assuming the biblical account is an impeccable historical record (70).

The next room, "Creation Day 4 – Astronomy," depicts the events of Genesis 1:14-19. The walls are decorated with images of celestial bodies such as the moon, galaxies, and nebulae, accompanied by captions that argue for divine creation. For instance, the images of the moon suggest that its perfect size and distance from the Earth could not have been created by natural processes, suggesting a deliberate design. At this point, the museum's strategy is consistent: any supposed weakness in a scientific theory that supports evolution, or the old earth, is taken as evidence for creationism (71). For example, the Big Bang contradicts the second law of thermodynamics because it supposedly cannot explain the order of the universe, implying that the universe would be chaotic without divine intervention (72). The final exhibit of Creation Week, "Creation Days 5-7," emphasizes the theme of complexity as evidence of divine design. It focuses on butterflies, praising their stages of development as examples of purposeful creation that no natural process could replicate. Visitors can interact with a touchscreen display to learn more about other animals that defy evolution, such as beavers, bombardier beetles, and woodpeckers. Nearby is a large display case of butterfly specimens, showing visitors the Earth's biodiversity and implicitly suggesting that this beauty and complexity must be the work of a creator (73).

Visitors then enter a room entitled "The Fall of Man," where the exhibits tell of Adam's sin, which, according to creationists, brought death into the world. The room's atmosphere reflects this dramatic change of subject: dim lighting, red filters over the lamps, and the sounds of menacing music from hidden speakers. A display argues that there was no death before this event; otherwise, Christ's sacrifice would have been useless and, consequently, it concludes that evolution, based on countless deaths before the emergence of man, could not have taken place and that all fossils must have emerged after Adam's fall. These conclusions are based on the literal truth of the Bible and follow a reverse conclusion: if the Bible is true, Adam must have been the first man and sinner, and since God would not have cursed the world before sin, there can have been no death and no fossils before Adam's sin; therefore, evolution must be false (74). Additionally, the "Fall of Man" exhibition features various displays focused on the global Flood, showing flood myths across different cultures as concrete evidence and its consequences. The exhibit then addresses the logistical problems of this event, using similar

arguments already seen in the Ark Encounter. Finally, "Fall of Man" talks about the existence of the Ark's remains on Mt. Ararat, summarizing the expeditions and reporting David Duckworth's testimony, but then stating that the Bible reassures that there is no prophecy that demands the Ark to be found (75-76). The next room is dedicated to young earth geology and criticizes uniformitarianism, the principle that past natural processes are the same as those today, as it somehow conflicts with young earth creationist views on fossils and fossilization. Additionally, a connecting corridor concludes the Flood narrative by stating that this catastrophic event triggered an ice age that lasted several hundred years (78).

After the "Fall of Man," a series of rooms presents and summarizes the vents after the Flood, focusing on the Tower of Babel and the origin of different ethnicities. Remarkably, the museum insists on discrediting archeological findings, highlighting that *Neanderthals*, *Homo erectus*, and other supposed ancestors were real humans (80) who lived at the same time. These rooms feature well-organized display cases containing artifacts dating from the Old Testament period to the first centuries AD and labels explaining their historical significance. Although not explicitly stated on all labels, these objects are evidence of the Bible's historical accuracy. Once again, racism is described as a consequence of evolutionary theories as the Bible talks about different ethnicities (81).

The following exhibition, "Ancient Civilizations," is dedicated to other cultures and religions. However, their depiction is overly pessimistic, with labels dismissing them with disdain and addressing them as extremely crude or unacceptable. The only religions that are considered almost closer to the truth are Judaism and Islam, but their lack of recognition of Jesus as their redeemer makes them imperfect (82).

As further proof of Christianity's truth claims, the "Hall of Scholars" features portraits and biographies of prominent scientists from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, depicted as perfect examples of creationists and professing Christians. Visitors are informed about their lives and discoveries with displays suggesting that everything in our world has been invented or postulated by creationist Christians. Although not explicitly stated, the message is clear: the nation's "creationist foundation" should not be forgotten.

The final room is dedicated to disproving evolution through scientific arguments, offering a touchscreen presentation that lets visitors observe the flawed evolutionary process in action. The second part of the room showcases past and ongoing ICR research projects, with the walls densely covered with texts, tables, and diagrams on various topics (83). However, this space overwhelms visitors with information that the average person is likely to absorb so that the museum can create a sense of confidence and trust. Visitors are encouraged to believe

that scientific work is being done, that it is rigorous, and that it supports creationism. The result is that they leave the exhibition confident that their belief in the literal truth of the Bible is scientifically based (84).

The Museum of the History of Creation and the Earth offers a captivating – at least for its target audience – exploration of the history of our planet. The exhibits are carefully arranged and detailed, and the museum guides enrich the visit with informative commentary. Moreover, the museum is suitable for all ages and offers an in-depth exploration of the Earth's geological and biological past.

However, the museum has received negative reviews over the years for its anachronistic creationist positions that cherry-pick all available scientific evidence to emphasize creationism. Many visitors, especially those who adhere to the theory of evolution, have criticized the museum's theories as fallacious. The exhibits seem designed to undermine scientific knowledge rather than provide evidence for creationism. In addition, some people were discouraged from taking advantage of the tour guides because they were not adequately prepared and often simplified the discoveries of creationist scientists by saying, "God did it." Finally, numerous visitors felt uncomfortable with the presentation of the dinosaurs in Noah's Ark because the theory was presented casually and lacked a thorough explanation. Therefore, many reviewers advised visiting the museum not hoping to learn something but to become even more convinced of the veracity of evolutionism.

5.3.2 The Discovery Center for Science and Earth History

On September 2, 2019, the ICR inaugurated a new institution, the Discovery Center for Science and Earth History. Located near the association's headquarters in Texas, this facility was designed to demonstrate the truth of God's creation.

Visitors are greeted by large fossils and a silver replica of the DNA, on which Bible verses are inscribed. Inside is a planetarium with demonstrations about the universe and the ocean, paintings illustrating the days of creation, and an auditorium for ICR's creation scientists' lectures.

The exhibitions feature new technologies, such as electronic displays and animatronics of famous historical figures, namely Isaac Newton (1642-1726), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), Robert Boyle (1627-1691), and Louis Pasteur (1822-1895), illustrating how biblical thinking and a Christian faith led to significant scientific discoveries. The exhibits guide visitors through Christ's life and resurrection, the origin of the universe, and the Garden of Eden, including

humanity's fall from grace. The "Tower of Babel" exhibit, for example, explains how the confusion of languages led to the formation of nations and the emergence of different ethnicities, while the "Life on the Ark" exhibit speculates that God may have sent young *Sauropod* dinosaurs onto the Ark because they were smaller and needed less food. Other exhibits include an Ice Age theater, explanations of Noah's Flood, the formation of the Grand Canyon in "just a few weeks," and the coexistence of humans and dinosaurs, a strong point of many creationist media and institutions. The Discovery Center covers all the central themes of young earth creationism, including creation in six days just a few thousand years ago, the lack of transitional forms, no death before Adam's sin, the global flood that produced nearly all the fossils, man's interaction with the dinosaurs, and that evolution only undermines Christianity (Moore 7).

However, the Discovery Center has only sometimes received positive reviews from visitors. One of the most recent was written by Andrew, a Christian father and dinosaur enthusiast, on "Dino Dad Reviews," his blog, in which he reviews different media and museums about this topic to help other parents (or caregivers) find suitable sources for their children. In his article "Institute for Creation Research Discovery Center," he claims:

> […] Unfortunately, entertainment seems to be the main focus at this institution. Even if we allow ICR their claim that they simply interpret the evidence in a different way, I still found the overall experience rather disappointing, from an educational perspective. I noticed a conspicuous lack of actual specimens and artifacts in the place […] One can quibble about interpretation vs evidence, but it seems this place consists of all interpretation and no evidence. Tellingly, the experience ends with a nice timeline diorama depicting the life of Jesus, with the implication that Jesus's salvation message somehow depends on their own interpretation of one quarter of the Book of Genesis. This would seem to be out of place if the attraction's intent is to educate visitors about science, but serves as the focal point of the whole experience if the main point of the center is to proselytize instead. As a Christian myself, I find it disappointing that institutions like this continue to insist that the foundation of the Christian faith lies not on the person of Jesus himself, but on an unnecessary interpretation of a few stories among hundreds of more important ones. Even ignoring the New Testament, any Biblical scholar will tell you that the covenants of Abraham and Moses impact the arc of the Biblical narrative far more than the creation and Flood accounts. (Andrew)

In conclusion, the Discovery Center for Science and Earth History is an innovative museum that uses the latest technologies to provide visitors with an unforgettable experience. In addition,

visitors can explore what the museum offers via promotional videos and a dedicated exhibition page on the official website. Although the commitment to biblical worldview is evident on the homepage, the website includes images of a diverse audience to counter the widespread perception of creationists as intolerant and to deflect attention away from critical journalists. However, while it may appear credible – at least from a biblical perspective – some may see this museum as propagandistic, aiming to convert people and distract them from scientific facts. This approach is common to all museums and perfectly shows the aim of these institutions: provide a (pseudo)scientific base for their creationist worldview, positioning themselves as a valid alternative to evolutionary theories.

CONCLUSION

Throughout its history, creationism has evolved not only on the theoretical level by including new theories and historical elements, such as, for example, dinosaurs, but also on the executive level. If, at the end of the nineteenth century, many were skeptical in their support of the Darwinian theory, the scientific discoveries of the twentieth century completely undermined creationist institutions, which, after the Scopes Trial, had to rapidly evolve and modernize to cope with the loss of support and notoriety. This process of innovation, still ongoing, allowed creationism to take on a more (pseudo)scientific nature and enter academic circles under the name of Creation Science. Finally, since the last years of the century, creationism has reached significant milestones, such as a greater diffusion throughout the country, to which the numerous creationist associations have also contributed, popularizing this theory by taking advantage of new technologies and adapting it to the needs of the new millennium.

This thesis aimed to contextualize and analyze the main characteristics of the American creationist movement and its development, with particular attention to cultural products aimed at children and teenagers, such as documentaries, books, and museums. These products share a common propagandistic purpose: instructing new generations in the biblical worldview and teaching them how to proselytize effectively. They achieve this by using more modern (pseudo)scientific arguments and methodologies, a strategic approach that raises concerns about the potential impact on future generations.

However, the analysis of the documentaries reveals a meticulous approach to dismantling "secular" theories and currents of thought, undermining their credibility through manipulation of the source materials and careful information selection, all supported by data and evidence. This thorough approach, while evolving the debate into a more "scientific," "rational" method, reduces these products to conspiracy theories in which the speakers spread disinformation and half-truths about evolution rather than focusing on their theory.

Similarly, despite using different approaches to educate their audience, the novels chosen for this thesis offer a comprehensive description of Creation Science in all its facets or focus on some aspects while using accessible language. While *The Great Dinosaur Mystery and the Bible* responds to "secular" books on dinosaurs by exploring this theme relying on the Bible, *The Truth Chronicles* and *The Secret of the Hidden Scrolls* use time-traveling and biblical apologetics to teach children about God's intelligent design, defending their faith, and not trusting "secular" theories, and creating a solid base for the future of creationism. Despite their

execution mode differences, *The Truth Chronicles* is the most explicit, precise, and exhaustive, exploring everything from classic themes such as Adam and Eve and the Flood to topics of greater cultural and scientific interest and depth, such as dinosaurs and global warming.

Finally, the creationist message takes on a completely different aspect in the museums where the biblical stories are brought to life thanks to technology. As explained in Chapter 4, creationist museums promote young-earth creationism as an actual science supported by institutions and important personalities within the movement. However, not only are the exhibitions crammed with information that hardly anyone lingers for more than a few minutes to read, but the exhibitions do not add any new information or better explanations but spread misinformation about "secular" scientific theories while referencing the Bible.

The common thread linking these three cultural products is their propagandistic purpose, which aims to consolidate and extend the influence of these religious beliefs and elevate them to the status of science. However, even if there has been a considerable improvement in the last century, the shortcomings of creationism cannot be ignored. One of the main problems lies, for example, in the argumentation of their theories, which are often reductive and based on false or outdated scientific ideas. Moreover, the creationists' obsession with Darwinism does not help their cause either, as it does not allow them to gain an overview or to present their arguments more convincingly. This limitation is evident in the documentaries in which the guests, college professors, and researchers spontaneously reduce their studies to a "Darwin is wrong, the Bible is right" argumentation. Therefore, although their positioning has changed significantly since the 1920s, it remains very limited. Another important issue is the aggressiveness that characterizes these cultural products. For example, as seen in Chapter 3, *The Truth Chronicles* uses dialog to spread its theories, but, at the same time, it very often plunges into invective against all those not of the Christian and creationist faith. Compared to the other books analyzed, it is clear that this series was produced to circulate within the movement and not outside it like the others, which are still highly propagandistic. Furthermore, throughout the story, readers are given tools to learn how to effectively spread and explain creationist theory while answering potential questions from evolutionists. However, the message the reader receives is not one of love: everyone must follow the way of God without looking for shortcuts or alternatives.

In conclusion, creationism has undergone a significant transformation process over the centuries, adapting its strategies to maintain its relevance in an increasingly "secular" world. Moreover, its success and diffusion are mainly due to the complicated American school landscape, where public schools are considered physically and intellectually dangerous, and

homeschooling is seen as a valid alternative by creationist families who worry about their children studying theories and ideas that will lead them astray from the path of God. In this sense, cultural products, such as documentaries, books, and museums, play a crucial role in shaping and educating this community. However, despite their sophisticated presentation, their limitations remain evident. Despite their (pseudo)scientific nature, indeed, the arguments proposed often rely on outdated, cherry-picked, and distorted scientific claims that focus more on attacking evolutionists rather than supporting their own theory. Finally, the propagandistic nature of these cultural products, together with religious absolutism, indeed undermines its ability to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the scientific community, positioning itself as a conspiracy theory rather than a scientific alternative.

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