

Reading the Bible Scientifically: Science and the Rise of Modern Biblical Criticism
in the Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century United States

By

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Abstract

This dissertation traces the development and reception of a particular accommodation between scientific knowledge and biblical knowledge, which I have named *scientific biblical criticism*, in the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. My research focuses on tensions that arose as American Protestants attempted to reconcile the biblical foundation of their worldview with the increasingly prominent accumulation of scientific facts and approaches. In juxtaposing the narratives in which each component of this method was developed, I document how nineteenth-century science was a multivalent and dynamic body of knowledge among disciples of religion as well as among disciples of nature. I also demonstrate how, viewed together, these accounts constitute an underappreciated religious discourse providing important insights into the formation and character of modern American science.

The larger context of this research is the struggle for legitimacy of two bodies of knowledge sometimes appearing to be at odds with one another. By assembling a diachronic view of the formation of scientific biblical criticism and considering the internal development of both religious knowledge and scientific knowledge, this dissertation establishes an intellectual history of a schism within American Protestantism with important repercussions for the reception of modern science. Out of this split emerged two practically incommensurable cosmologies with divergent conceptions of what constitutes legitimate science and admissible interpretation of the Bible. Because both of these worldviews spread from professional circles to lay audiences, this project also examines both scholarly and popular literature to add considerable detail and nuance to the histories previously dominated by elite actors.

In addition to chronicling the significant activity of the proponents of scientific biblical criticism in the United States, I illustrate how various communities of academics and laypeople received this scholarly method and the disruption to traditional epistemology that it entailed. Exploring the internal dynamics of Protestant networks on their own terms, my research offers important insights about scientific knowledge, its practice, and its boundaries among the religious adherents of science underrepresented in the historical literature.

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Introduction: Scientific and Biblical Worldviews in the Modernizing United States

In 1859, nearing the end of his life, the New England Unitarian minister and abolitionist Theodore Parker reminisced about the many years he had spent studying German innovations in biblical scholarship, marveling that Germany was “the only land where theology was... studied as a science, and developed with scientific freedom.”¹ Worrying that American theologians were failing to engage with the scientific spirit of their age, Parker promoted these radical interpretive approaches among his New England colleagues in the late 1830s and 1840s, delighting in the detached, academic rigor of the Germans, who seemed unencumbered by traditional concerns about preserving doctrine and supporting everyday religious practice.²

Although professional scholars have come to recognize the significance of religious activity in the history of science, laypeople still frequently embrace the tempting idea that religious concerns are irrelevant or even hostile to scientific thought.³ Published expressions of this “warfare” interpretation appeared in the United States in the 1860s and 1870s, when popular authors and speakers began to characterize the relationship between scientific knowledge and religious knowledge as one of inescapable conflict. However, as twentieth-century historians of science came to recognize religious scholarship as an intellectual activity overlapping and

¹ Theodore Parker, “The Letter from Santa Cruz, Called ‘Theodore Parker’s Experience as a Minister,’ “ in *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, Minister of the 28th Congregational Society, Boston* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), II:447-513, quotation on 462.

² Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 70.

³ Thomas F. Gieryn, “Boundary-Work and the Demarcation of Science from Non-Science: Strains and Interests in the Professional Ideologies of Scientists,” *American Sociological Review* 48:6 (December 1983), 781-795.

influencing scientific questioning rather than only opposing it, some have acknowledged how valuable it is to clarify the role of religious thought in the historical development of science.⁴ Historian of science Herbert Hovenkamp characterized nineteenth-century Protestantism as “a broad experiment in the unification of knowledge and belief.”⁵ A crucial development in this experiment occurred with Theodore Parker and his promotion of “scientific” biblical scholarship. Parker’s career provides one particularly vivid example of an influential religious leader who did not view the shifting American intellectual landscape as a necessary site of conflict, but as an opportunity to recast scriptural knowledge as compatible with scientific values and methods.

Columbia University philosopher John Herman Randall, Jr. observed, “We must recognize that the most significant effect of science upon religion has come from the scientific study of religion itself.”⁶ That is, it wasn’t simply an incidental consequence of science studying its own domain that polarized American Protestants in the decades following the Civil War and with momentous repercussions to this day. It was the efforts to universalize the authority of scientific knowledge, to extend scientific values and methods beyond the realm of natural phenomena to include even religious claims, that shook the pillars of American knowledge with such lasting consequences. This dissertation addresses a conspicuous gap in the historiography of science and religion: the reinterpretation of biblical texts to accommodate scientific knowledge

⁴ Kenneth E. Boulding, “Science: Our Common Heritage,” *Science* 207:4433 (February 22, 1980), 831-836.

⁵ Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), x.

⁶ John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1958), 4.

among Protestants in the United States. This narrative merits our attention because it documents the presence of a viable tradition of harmonization of biblical Christianity and the scientific worldview, counteracting the persistent trope that the science-religion dialogue consists essentially of polarization between scientistic atheists and obscurantist Bible-thumpers. This warfare trope persists partly because some especially vocal networks really have become that polarized, separating into proponents of the Bible narratives as literal and complete truth, on the one hand, and of science as anti-religious, on the other hand. As these two opposed worldviews have benefited from quarrelsome self-promotion, it is difficult for the twenty-first-century reader to recognize that evangelical Christianity has occupied an entire spectrum of political positions and attitudes toward science and modern developments. Certainly, we can think of many more examples of religious traditionalists who are politically reactionary than liberal, and counterexamples of the Evangelical Left seem few and far between: former US President Jimmy Carter, publisher Jim Wallis, and preacher Billy Graham, being the most prominent. Similarly, although it would surprise some of the more obstinate proponents of science, there is no shortage of professional students of nature who also make room in their cosmology for religious, or at least spiritual, concerns.

My research traces the efforts of American Protestants to establish a sustainable harmonization between scientific knowledge and biblical knowledge, specifically in introducing the “scientific” interpretation of the Bible. This narrative begins haltingly in the 1830s, as Theodore Parker incorporated German theological and biblical thought into his own writings. I explore research from the worlds of religious scholarship and scientific scholarship as they are influenced by new traditions of understanding the Bible and acknowledging its original cultural

and historical contexts. I give particular attention to the transfer of religious knowledge and biblical knowledge from networks of scholars to a larger, non-scholarly readership, noting also the slippage in vocabulary and rigor as curious laypeople engage with prominent controversies over the authority and role of science and Scripture. This project ends in the 1930s, after the militant Protestant reactionaries known as fundamentalists largely withdrew from debates with the rest of the theological spectrum over the interpretation of the Bible.

The appropriation of disciplinary vocabulary by non-experts presents a particular challenge in this project. My actors include learned practitioners of science, religion, and philosophy, who generally abided by the established vocabulary of their professional networks; educated elites opining on matters outside their area of expertise; and laypeople with varying levels of understanding and consistency about these disciplines, often using terms in their popular meaning rather than their specialist meaning. Navigating these overlapping networks requires a certain level of religious literacy, and thus a number of important terms are defined in this Introduction.

The Vocabulary of Biblical Discourse

The *Bible* is an anthology of religious texts of different forms, including theologically-annotated historical accounts, hymns, didactic correspondence, allegories, and parables. Different religious traditions and communities consider different groupings of these writings (also called *books*, such as the Book of Genesis) as their official canon. These particular documents are held by Christians as authoritative revelations by God, who either authored them directly or guided their human dictation. Those who revere the Bible as religious truth also commonly call it *Scripture*,

while non-believers typically do not use this term. Among Protestants, the subset of Christianity addressed in this dissertation, the canonical Bible consists of a set of texts from ancient Hebrew writings by the Israelites, commonly called the *Hebrew scriptures*, and another set addressing the person and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth and events in first-century Christianity, commonly called the *Christian scriptures*. Together, these texts provide the foundation for the Christian worldview and convey to believers a particular natural and spiritual order in the universe.⁷

In addition to the histories of ancient peoples, the Bible also describes a number of developments related to the natural world and humanity's place in it. Scholars have noted that the cosmology of the Bible bears a strong resemblance to those of ancient Egypt and of the Sumerians living in Mesopotamia between 3100 and 1700 BCE.⁸ The Hebrew scriptures, also commonly called the *Old Testament* by Christians, chronicle the formation of the universe and the earth, the creation and interrelation of life, and the special creation of humanity as possessing unique moral awareness and responsibility. For example, the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 gives significant attention to the formation of the natural order: the cycle of days and nights is created first, with the separation of light from darkness. Next, the water of rain from the heavens is separated from the water of seas and springs. Then the earth is separated from the waters

⁷ Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, "Introduction," *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, eds. Hatch and Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 3-18; Harry S. Stout, "Word and Order in Colonial New England," in *The Bible in America*, 19-38; Nathan O. Hatch, "*Sola Scriptura* and *Novus Ordo Seclorum*," in *The Bible in America*, 59-78; George M. Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter?: The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth Century America," in *The Bible in America*, 79-100; John Alden, "The Bible as Printed Word," *The Bible and Bibles in America*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 9-28.

⁸ John R. Roberts, "Biblical Cosmology: The Implications for Bible Translation," *Journal of Translation* 9:2 (2013), 1-53, on 1, 6, 13-18; Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 24ff.

below into land masses. Next, with the soil, rains, and light already in place, the earth is populated with three categories of plant life: the grasses, the plants producing seed, and the trees producing fruit. Next, the sun, moon, and stars are set in the firmament to mark the time and the seasons. Then the creatures of the sea, air, and land are created. Lastly, humanity is formed in the Creator's own image, to multiply and serve as superintendent of this created natural order. One notable distinction in the Old Testament is that the many gods and demigods of the Ancient Near East myths are replaced with *Elohim*, the Hebrew title for the Most High God, as the sole, purposeful creator and governor of the natural order, entailing that the principles of creation not be contradictory. The Old Testament also contains descriptions, often religiously embellished and interpreted, of natural events, such as earthquakes, floods, eclipses, plagues, and famines. The Christian scriptures, often also called the *New Testament*, make fewer claims about natural events, but reinforce the teaching that humanity was created divinely with a particular status and responsibility, which is considered substantiated by the performance of a number of miraculous demonstrations—that is, events prominently violating the lawful behavior of nature. An especially significant example of this is in the Old Testament book of Joshua, in which the Israelites are able to defeat the Amorite armies when God miraculously stops the passage of the sun and moon across the sky.⁹ This passage has been invoked as evidence for a geocentric cosmos, in which the heavenly bodies revolve around the earth. The special human role in this created order and the manifestation of miracles as evidence are principles so central to Christian doctrine that the faithful have historically had particular difficulty relinquishing them in the face of newer, naturalistic explanations.¹⁰

⁹ Joshua 10:12-14.

¹⁰ Hatch and Noll, "Introduction," 3-18; Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter?" 79-100; Alden, "Bible as Printed Word," 9-28.

Believers have long experienced the content of the Bible as cryptic or ambiguous, and religious scholars and leaders have debated for centuries over its intended or “true” meaning.¹¹ Thomas Paine noted that, while nature was the direct handiwork of God and accessible through the ordinary senses, the Bible had been penned by men, and had suffered corruption through repeated copying and translation.¹² The activity of rigorously studying and understanding the Bible, in its broadest sense, is referred to as *biblical criticism*. Participation in biblical criticism has generally assumed a number of basic principles. First, students of the Bible have typically considered the book a divinely inspired unity, such that one text could be clarified or interpreted by referring to other passages. Second, although the Old Testament and New Testament were put into written form hundreds of years apart, Christian doctrine reconciled their different styles and subject matter by linking them as prophecy and fulfillment, respectively; that is, the New Testament has been understood as the successful occurrence of the Old Testament’s predictions. Third, biblical scholars before the eighteenth century could generally avail themselves of three accepted methods of making sense of the Bible: an allegorical approach, in which readers searched the text for symbolic messages; a moral approach, in which the texts communicated lessons for individual or social conduct; and a doctrinal approach, in which the narrative was interpreted to justify the Church’s teachings. Although additional interpretive methods emerged

¹¹ David C. Lindberg, “Galileo, the Church, and the Cosmos,” *When Science and Christianity Meet*, David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 33-60, on 45, 58-59.

¹² John Hedley Brooke, “Science and Theology in the Enlightenment,” in *Religion & Science: History, Method, Dialogue*, eds. W. Mark Richardson and Wesley J. Wildman (New York: Routledge Press, 1996), 7-27, on 14.

from the study of secular literary and historical documents, it was widely agreed that the Bible was a unique form of knowledge that merited its own scholarly tradition. Most conspicuous was the principle that the Bible was *autopiston* (αὐτόπιστος), or self-authenticating, and did not require corroboration to serve as authoritative knowledge. As this dissertation will show, the claim of the Bible's narratives as "true" occurred in a broad spectrum of forms, from their validity only as spiritual guidance to their literal truth as authoritative as any scientific fact.¹³

The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth-century Western world involved a significant reordering of humanity's relationship to the contents and role of the Bible. The Catholic Church had developed an elaborate system of teachings and mediators to generate additional religious truth, which church reformers rejected as corrupt. Central to the Reformation was the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, claiming that Scripture was the only source of authoritative doctrine and explicitly rejecting any other claims to infallible authority. The elevation of the Bible over church tradition and a mediating priesthood necessitated greater literacy among believers, and Protestant movements articulated guidance about how the laity might read its texts properly, including how to understand its claims in relation to their everyday experiences of the world. Although the reality of Protestant thought and individual discernment was always more complex than the motto *sola scriptura* implied, in general Protestant leaders strived to maintain theologies with the Bible's worldview and guidance at their center.¹⁴

¹³ Janet Browne, "Noah's Flood, the Ark, and the Shaping of Early Modern Natural History," in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 111-138; Ernest R. Sandeen, "The Princeton Theology: One Source of Biblical Literalism in American Protestantism," *Church History* 31:3 (September 1962), 307-321, on 307-310.

¹⁴ Hatch, "Sola Scriptura," 59-78; Lydia Willsky-Ciullo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 1-21.

One of the central challenges of Bible interpretation has been the reconciliation of its claims, often incredible and fantastical, with our experience and knowledge of the natural world. Medieval scholars had commonly viewed the physical world as the Book of Nature, to be consulted alongside the Book of Scripture for the fullest knowledge. It was nearly universally assumed among Christians that their God was the author of both books, which were therefore safely trusted to be compatible.¹⁵ The moral lessons of the Bible were available even to unlettered Christians through the allegorical interpretation of nature; for example, one might consider the ant or the bee as an example of virtuous industriousness. One widespread expression of the Two Books was the “argument from design,” concluding that the intricacy and interrelatedness of nature provided conclusive proof of an intelligent Creator. Although a popular early modern practice called Natural Theology arose from this association, encouraging even ordinary people to seek evidence in nature for religious teachings, this school of thought never constituted a rigorous methodology, and will not be addressed in detail in this dissertation.

More relevant is what I will call here the *Protestant Congruence*, a widespread assumption of, and commitment to, the general agreement between the Bible’s claims and the

¹⁵ Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 45-63, 167-169, 193-204; Peter Harrison, “The Metaphor ‘the Book of Nature’ and Early Modern Science,” *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, eds. Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (Leuven, Belgium: Peeter, 2006), 1-26, on 8ff.; G. Blair Nelson, “Ethnology and the ‘Two Books’: Some Nineteenth-Century Americans on Preadamist Polygenism,” *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions, 1700-Present*, eds. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2008), 145-179, on 145-146, 173, 175; Ronald L. Numbers, “Reading the Book of Nature through American Lenses,” eds. van Berkel and Vanderjagt, *Book of Nature*, 261-274; John Henry, “Religion and the Scientific Revolution,” *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 39-58, on 46-47; G. Blair Nelson, “‘Men before Adam!’: American Debates over the Unity and Antiquity of Humanity,” in Lindberg and Numbers, eds., *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 161-181, on 173-176.

growing body of knowledge about the natural world. In an overwhelmingly Protestant United States, the accommodation of science and the Bible proceeded from a decidedly Protestant understanding of nature and religion. This included the principles that God had created the natural world and left abundant evidence of this authorship, and that additional information about God was communicated to humanity in the Bible. Among the Puritans of the early United States, this accommodation took the particular form of the Protestant Congruence, in which natural revelation and biblical revelation could only conflict if they were misunderstood. As the various sciences began to take their more modern form in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this principle motivated many Protestants to take scientific knowledge more seriously, even to the point of challenging and unseating long-held biblical teachings. The significant optimism among Protestants in the trustworthiness of this agreement has significantly shaped the development and implementation of their religious teachings.¹⁶

For those who found natural knowledge a sufficient source of revelation in some situations, two additional terms will be useful. The complete denial of supernatural entities, or *metaphysical naturalism*, attracted little interest in an overwhelmingly Christian United States, except as a straw man when the more orthodox wanted to criticize threatening ideas. Rather, serious students of nature increasingly limited their explanations of the natural world in terms of natural forces alone, a range of positions known as *methodological naturalism*.

¹⁶ Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America*, xi (Protestant understanding of nature and religion), 16-17 (Puritan tradition).

In the United States in particular, the fecund religious landscape produced a gamut of new religious and spiritual movements, from staid to outlandish, expressing different dimensions of the Protestant Congruence. The British settlers colonizing North America preserved and extended the *evangelical* tradition, emphasizing individualistic introspection, personal conversion, and spiritual rebirth, periodically erupting in enthusiastic and emotional revivals sweeping through New England in the waves of the Great Awakening.¹⁷ American society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was overwhelmingly dominated by evangelical Protestantism. Particularly relevant to this dissertation was the near-complete hegemony of evangelical culture and thought over the emerging system of schools, colleges, and universities, stamping its religious identity upon the development of intellectual life in the United States.¹⁸ This sectarian character also extended to the proliferation of scientific exploration and learning, in educational institutions; in popular lectures, demonstrations, and courses; in articles, pamphlets, magazines, and books.¹⁹ The Protestant Congruence, that is, commitment to the compatibility of the Bible and science, exerted considerable influence over the shape of American knowledge in practically every context.

One of the most significant points of contention in the interaction between biblical knowledge and natural knowledge was related to the doctrine of *inspiration*. Protestants occupied a broad spectrum of positions about the provenance of the Bible, and what its origin

¹⁷ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 8.

¹⁸ David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985), 47-50.

¹⁹ Mark A. Noll, *Protestants in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 51-81.

entailed about its trustworthiness and authority.²⁰ Historians of Christianity John Dillenberger and Claude Welch note how fundamental this principle was to the development of modern forms of biblical scholarship. Historical criticism was not responsible, as some had claimed, for new understandings of the Bible spreading among progressive Protestants. “In fact, the situation was more nearly the reverse. It was new conceptions of religious authority and of the meaning of revelation which made possible the development of biblical criticism.”²¹ The scholars most curious about bringing new methods into American biblical scholarship were, not coincidentally, also men who considered Scripture as divinely inspired, although still subject to misrepresentation by its human authors. These thinkers expressed concern that more exalted views of biblical inspiration threatened to reduce the Bible to a rigid unity that allowed passages to be cited outside of their context and as God’s literal word. The more traditional Protestants, particularly in the evangelical movements, expressed a range of positions on how the Bible was divinely inspired and therefore uniquely infallible and authoritative as a body of knowledge. Many accepted a degree of dynamism in which the authors had chosen the words but were divinely guided to record the essential message correctly. More restrictive was the view known as *verbal plenary inspiration*, in which God chose the actual words to be transcribed. The most extreme position, known as *dictation theory*, depicts the authors as no more than recording machines for the divine word, and frequently describes the resulting text as inerrant.²² This

²⁰ Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 19-23, 52-56.

²¹ John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), quotation on 197.

²² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *The New American Commentary, Volume 34: 1, 2 Timothy, Titus* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 234-240.

inerrantism appeared historically primarily as a rhetorical claim; practically no evangelical before the twentieth century defended it as a viable doctrine in light of clear contradictions in the text. In general, the more traditional Protestant scholars resisted the introduction of extra-biblical sources, which threatened to undermine the absolutely binding authority of Scripture; they therefore typically also resisted the development of historical and critical interpretations, which relied on the authority of sources such as history and the sciences.²³

A number of significant disagreements arose between the findings of scientific exploration and the Bible narratives; most notable were: the age and creation of the cosmos; the emergence of life; the processes of speciation; and the appearance of humanity.²⁴ For many American Christians, the strength of their commitment to the Protestant Congruence justified some degree of reinterpretation of key biblical passages to preserve the harmony of the Two Books. When scientific facts appeared to contradict a scriptural claim, I have observed actors responding from a wide range of claimed positions, extending from sole reliance on the Bible to sole reliance on secular scientific knowledge:

1. Biblical purists unwilling to admit knowledge from external sources, practicing Bible interpretation as completely internalist and self-evidencing;
2. Protestant modernists willing to accept the fruits of science, such as mass media technologies, but not any scientific modifications to the Bible;
3. Ambivalent Protestants willing to admit natural knowledge gained by basic empirical methods, but suspicious or uncertain about the conclusions of modern science: evolutionism, anti-supernaturalism, the universal applicability of science, and no exceptions for the Bible. These believers were generally committed to the Protestant

²³ Robert W. Funk, "The Watershed of the American Biblical Tradition: The Chicago School, First Phase, 1892-1920," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95:1 (March 1976), 4-22.

²⁴ Browne, "Noah's Flood," 111-138.

Congruence in theory, but in practice struggled and were easily swayed by strong arguments;

4. Reformers willing to modify Bible interpretations to accommodate the discoveries of modern science, specifically with the intent to strengthen biblical Christianity;
5. Critics of the Bible's exalted cultural role, invested in biblical criticism primarily as a tool to restrain religious encroachment into intellectual and civil spheres; and
6. Secularists with no interest in biblical scholarship, except perhaps to criticize religious belief as superstition or myth.

An especially persistent claim among laypeople even today has been that science and religion are inescapably at odds, representing the last two categories on the above continuum. One conclusion of this dissertation will be how inadequately this conflict thesis represents the historical breadth of responses to the intersection of scientific knowledge and biblical knowledge.

In response to the complex and often baffling corpus of texts that make up the Bible, a number of academic methods have developed to produce a better understanding of its meaning and authority. The traditional study of Scripture was intended to reconstruct the original text and determine its intended meaning, and thus came to be known as *textual criticism* (or *lower criticism*). A rise in historical consciousness and a number of archaeological discoveries fueled the emergence of new approaches to deciphering the Bible, originating particularly in the universities of the German Confederation in the early nineteenth century. Particularly controversial was the historical-critical method, often called the *higher biblical criticism*, which strove to explore the authorship, date, and circumstances of composition of the original text. Perhaps most threatening, the higher critics aspired to bring neutral, objective criteria of

judgment to their work, rather than reasoning from the perspective of a believer.²⁵ As scientific knowledge became more pervasive and obviously relevant over the course of the nineteenth century, a number of biblically devoted Protestants developed an interpretive tradition aspiring to understand the Bible worldview and texts through a more scientific lens. Although these interpreters did not share a distinctive name for this emerging set of methods, in this dissertation I will classify it with the analyst's category of *scientific biblical criticism*. Despite the fact that my actors used this particular term only rarely, their approaches to understanding Scripture self-consciously and explicitly invoked the vocabulary, methods, and evidence from scientific exploration. This dissertation will explore specifically the development of certain pillars of scientific biblical criticism: that biblical knowledge can evolve; that the Bible can be reinterpreted in light of well-established external knowledge; that the Bible not be considered exempt from the principles of criticism applied to all other writings; and that the evolutionary worldview included not only the natural world, but also the Bible and its claims. Additionally, it is important to note that claims to scientific status cannot simply be taken at face value. Two very different groups of American Protestants described their approaches as scientific and constructed two almost completely incommensurable worldviews from their differing commitments to science and the Bible. This dissertation will explore the developing claims of scientific forms of biblical criticism in the United States and the range of responses to this category among American Protestants.

²⁵ Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 176-179.

The spread of higher biblical criticism and scientific biblical criticism in the mid- and late nineteenth century, first among scholars and then among the reading public, drove a significant wedge into the existing divisions among American Protestants.²⁶ In practice, the first two categories in the aforementioned spectrum of responses held to a cosmology based in the truth of the biblical narrative and the exception of the divinely revealed Bible to the otherwise lawful natural order. In contrast, the last three categories above embraced the corrective authority of scientific knowledge to some degree, from accepting minor reinterpretations of the Bible, to rejecting religious views entirely. A significant portion of American Protestantism remained in the middle, being committed to the Congruence of science and the Bible in the abstract, but unsure of how much of their traditional understanding of the Bible they were willing to relinquish. This third category plays an especially significant role in this narrative, as they were often readily swayed to one side or the other by compelling campaigns.

In the late nineteenth century, as the evangelical hegemony of higher education and intellectual life in the United States was weakening, a particularly militant movement of evangelical Christians coalesced, drawing its followers from the first three categories in the aforementioned continuum. Insisting on a new degree of internalist purity in understanding the Bible texts, these ultraconservatives took the name *fundamentalists*. This dissertation will take special care to demonstrate that fundamentalists constituted only a part of evangelical Christianity, as the twenty-first-century perspective typically conflates religious conservatism

²⁶ D. G. Hart, "Nineteenth-Century Biblical Criticism," in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Gary B. Ferngren et al. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 92-96; Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 18-20.

and political conservatism. This particular expression of presentism becomes especially problematic when we consider, for example, William Jennings Bryan in Chapter Six, a political populist who cast his lot with the religious reactionaries in their crusade against the threats challenging the biblical cosmology.

The proto-fundamentalists' discontent around the turn of the twentieth century first targeted a constellation of recent intellectual and social developments collectively criticized as *modernism*, including theological liberalism, the Social Gospel, industrialization and urbanization, social permissiveness, higher biblical criticism, and Darwinian evolution.²⁷ Of these wide-ranging foes, the forming movement's leadership had initially focused on modern biblical scholarship and the threat it posed to their purist understanding of Scripture. However, the aggressive and charismatic Baptist preacher William Bell Riley chose, for strategic reasons, to shift the campaign's energy to fighting the proliferation of evolutionary thought, particularly in tax-supported schools. Under his guidance, the fundamentalists suppressed dissent among their ranks to this change in adversary, and engaged in a nationwide grassroots operation opposed specifically to evolutionism. The collision of opponents and proponents of evolution received especially prominent publicity in the 1925 *Scopes* trial, in Dayton, Tennessee, although other important skirmishes are underrepresented in historical literature. As resistance to the scientific theory dwindled among scientists and the public, the fundamentalist crusade found

²⁷ A number of historians have helped to assess the various expressions of modernism and anti-modernism in American thought. Particularly valuable for this project were Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981); Linda Wagner-Martin, *The Routledge Introduction to American Modernism* (New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016); and especially Mark A. Noll, "Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism," in *History of Science and Religion*, eds. Ferngren et al., 341-350.

itself without other issues to rouse its members after about 1927, and it redirected its energies into denominational squabbles and organizing at the local level.

The split between biblical modernists and anti-modernists involved the construction of two cosmologies that philosopher and historian of science Thomas Kuhn might describe as incommensurable—opposed at such a fundamental level as to be practically irreconcilable.²⁸ The evangelical promoters of scientific biblical criticism typically integrated into their worldview an array of modern scientific principles: the universal applicability of science, with no exceptions for the Bible or its claims; evolution evident at every level of creation and understood as God’s design; and the minimizing of supernaturalist claims to a surprising degree. In contrast, the fundamentalists admitted science only in its pre-modern form, limited to facts determined by direct observation, compatible with their pre-existing commitment to the biblical narrative, and explicitly rejecting evolutionism and the reduction of the Bible to a merely human chronicle. This divergence of worldviews lent itself to the further entrenchment of militant positions and ideological purity. After the denouement of *Scopes*, another generation passed before fundamentalists were able to seek common cause with their former Protestant opponents.

Historiography

This dissertation began with the question “Why and how did the fundamentalists change their primary adversary from higher biblical criticism to evolutionary thought?” The movement’s shift from attacking a relatively narrow academic concern to one more broadly familiar and accessible

²⁸ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 368-369 (cosmology); Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 103, 198ff. (incommensurability).

to the American public also suggested “How did epistemological concerns, such as the status and authority of biblical or scientific knowledge, flow between and among scholarly networks and laypeople?” Because I have always intended for this project to be a dissertation on the history of science, I wondered particularly how observant Christians professed to be both “biblical” and “scientific” in their opinions, and whether any traditions managed to accommodate meaningfully both commitments in their worldview. I have chosen to take an intellectual history approach to these questions, following the development and reception of the concept of scientific biblical criticism, an idea arising in the United States in the 1830s and generating considerable debate until about the late 1930s. In doing so I have sought a variety of perspectives about how science and the Bible are claimed to inform one another and contradict one another. Of course, because “science” and “biblical Christianity” are contextual and historically contingent concepts, it is important to acknowledge that their meanings for the man of religion Theodore Parker and the man of science Benjamin Silliman in 1830 differ from one another, and differ even more considerably from their uses a century later.

My treatment of this historical project draws upon a disparate collection of scholarly and more popular sources, intending to highlight particularly the transit of knowledge between the academic sphere and interested laypeople. Especially in the first chapter, where the discussion of serious biblical scholarship was limited almost exclusively to theological faculty and clergy, the writings of these scholars to one another have dominated my sources. In addition to their monographs and essays, I have researched extensively the journals intended for academic audiences, notably the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* and *Bibliotheca Sacra*, denominational newspapers such as the Unitarian *Christian Register*, and popular periodicals

such as *Sunday School Times*. In the second chapter, where I have chronicled the ideas and activity of students of nature, the literature was not yet formalized into modern scientific disciplines and also demonstrated a much more porous boundary between the professional and the amateur than today's reader has come to expect. Additionally, scientific monographs, essays, lectures, and periodicals did not exhibit the compunction, prominent in religious scholarship, that laypeople should be protected from difficult ideas; the sources I have explored, such as *American Journal of Science* and *Popular Science Monthly*, not only acknowledged their amateur readers but encouraged the rise of popular interest in science.

Because I intend to give special attention to the dynamics internal to American Protestantism, the literatures of American religious history and Protestant theology, and especially of American biblical criticism, have been central to this dissertation. Writings about the development of scriptural interpretation have been dominated by the internalist concerns of denominational apologetics—that is, asking how Scripture can be demonstrated to uphold existing religious doctrine. This has necessitated looking particularly closely at the histories of the particular Protestant communities at the center of each chapter, such as the Unitarians of New England in Chapter One, and the Presbyterians and Baptists in Chapters Three through Six. Attention to these bodies of writing illustrates how religious professionals conceptualized science differently than scientific practitioners understood their own work. Additionally, the history of philology plays an important role in this research, as the use of language and the lower criticism of the Bible serve as the foundation for more radical traditions of interpretation later in the nineteenth century.

One development within American Protestantism requiring especially careful scrutiny is the history of fundamentalism, which historians have already abundantly assessed but with not entirely satisfying results. In particular, the common interpretation of this movement as a burst of anti-intellectual unreason that arose and metamorphosed inexplicably, only to be humiliated for its hubris at the *Scopes* trial and swiftly dissolved, requires more serious attention to religious and social motivation if it is to produce anything more than caricature. Although the architect of early fundamentalism, William Bell Riley, is central to this narrative, I have also explored the activity of the colleagues who disagreed with his leadership and wished to keep their crusade true to its original goal of combatting modern biblical criticism. Riley and his peers wrote prodigiously and were reported widely in local newspapers, many of which are readily available in digital form and have helped me document the fundamentalists' understanding and skepticism about scientific knowledge as a handmaiden to biblical knowledge.

As the history of science is the heart of this dissertation project, the literature on the development of the natural and social sciences in the United States is the foundation of my historiography. However, I have read these writings with particular care, not only for their scientific content, but also for the religious commitments and development of their actors. As science evolved considerably over this period, I have looked also at the dialogue within specific disciplines, for example in geology, where colleagues developed collaboratively the reinterpretation of the Genesis narrative to accommodate their discoveries. Additionally, this timeline also includes the increasing marginalization of religious explanations of the natural world, and I have documented the normalization of methodological naturalism among scientific practitioners, their private religious beliefs notwithstanding.

Unfortunately, tracing this activity within institutions of higher education and religious networks has produced an entirely white and very male narrative. Particularly in colleges and universities, access to the discourse of biblical criticism was almost entirely withheld from women and African Americans. This dissertation only establishes the basic skeleton onto which much still needs to be added, but promising starting points are already evident. For example, Margaret Fuller has been praised as “the most brilliant woman in America,” and she, Elizabeth Peabody, and other well-read women were regular interlocutors with Theodore Parker as he struggled to introduce higher biblical criticism in the United States.²⁹ Women were also drawn in impressive numbers to the lay Bible study courses of William Rainey Harper and to the Sunday school movement, where thousands wrestled with the meaning of the Bible’s messages in a modernizing society.³⁰ Women were active participants in the fundamentalist movement, but positions of leadership were generally unavailable to them. Although I only nod at the significance of gender and race in this dissertation, there are a number of works that provide some promising starting places: Betty DeBergs’ *Ungodly Women* (1990), Margaret Lamberts Bendroth’s *Fundamentalism and Gender* (1993), Michael Lienesch’s *In the Beginning* (2007), and various writings by Jeffrey P. Moran begin to remedy this gap in the historical literature. Although positions of religious leadership are overwhelmingly occupied by men in my project,

²⁹ Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), quotation on 110.

³⁰ Robert Lee Carter, “The ‘Message of the Higher Criticism’: The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 25-26, 93, 106-109; William Rainey Harper, “Report of the Principal of Schools of the American Institute of Sacred Literature,” *The Old and New Testament Student* 11:6 (December, 1890), 364-365.

American Protestant congregations have long been matriarchal institutions and surely offer sources for further research into broader responses to modern biblical criticism.³¹

Chapter Overview and Central Interventions

The first two chapters of this dissertation function in parallel, chronicling the different activity of biblical scholars and men of science, respectively, in navigating the relationships between the Bible and scientific knowledge from the first decades of the nineteenth century to the time of the Civil War. Similarly, the last two chapters trace the differing attitudes and postbellum institution-building of the proponents of scientific biblical criticism and the detractors of modern critical approaches and evolutionary thought. This structure provides some synchronic depth to an otherwise mostly diachronic project.

Chapter One focuses on the religious origins of scientific biblical criticism, specifically arising from the institutional foundation provided by the Dexter Chair for Sacred Literature at Harvard College, and in the most tireless disseminator of this interpretive approach, New England Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. Although Parker's efforts did not successfully establish an American lineage of scientific Bible study or the institutional trappings necessary to

³¹ Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender, 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Jeffrey P. Moran, "Reading Race into the Scopes Trial: African American Elites, Science, and Fundamentalism," *The Journal of American History* 90:3 (December 2003), 891-911, and "The Scopes Trial and Southern Fundamentalism in Black and White: Race, Region, and Religion," *The Journal of Southern History* 70:1 (February 2004), 95-120; Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Karin E. Gedge, *Without Benefit of Clergy: Women and the Pastoral Relationship in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), *passim*.

preserve it, his writings nevertheless represented an indelible starting point for the later proponents and opponents of this approach. We see in Parker and his colleagues that the concepts of *science* and *scientist* were as multivalent among religious scholars as they were among students of nature. From this “outsider’s view,” Parker invoked science as a philosophical stance ignorant of the practitioners’ view of their discipline, leading him to promote a view in which biblical knowledge could evolve in response to new evidence and critical reinterpretation, the first pillar of American scientific biblical criticism. The writings of Parker and his Unitarian colleagues dominate the network of scholars who gave serious attention to the intellectual and religious repercussions of bold German thought transplanted into the very different American soil. Although these religious leaders and academics remained confident in the integrity of rigorous study of the Bible, they quickly diverged in their willingness to follow these radical studies to their conclusion, with lasting consequences even to this day.

Chapter Two follows a similar tack, exploring and analyzing the efforts to reconcile the Bible and emerging scientific knowledge among serious students of nature. Central to this chapter are the Protestant geologists Benjamin Silliman, Edward Hitchcock, and James Dwight Dana, who exerted considerable influence in promoting interpretations of the Genesis creation narrative compatible with the natural evidence for the age and origins of the earth. Not surprisingly, these naturalists were less knowledgeable about the latest German scholarship than Parker and his religious colleagues, and more focused on the practice of science in their particular areas of research, rather than at a philosophical level. This chapter traces in the writings of these three figures and their contemporaries the growing practice of invoking external knowledge such as geological evidence in interpreting the Bible. Their methods and conclusions

were widely published, particularly through Silliman's *American Journal of Science*, the nation's most significant scientific periodical, which communicated these ideas to scholars and laypeople alike. Working from within the sciences, we see a different approach to biblical scholarship. Scientific practitioners addressed biblical discrepancies from the local perspective of their research, and generalizing their conclusions to include the Bible and its claims. This network of scholars contributed another pillar to scientific biblical criticism—the insistence that Bible passages must be reinterpreted if they conflict with external knowledge that is solidly supported by observable evidence. This particular lineage of pious students of nature also helps to illustrate the shifting window of permissible accommodations between Christianity and science, as it was becoming less acceptable among these “men of science” to consider supernatural explanations for their findings.

A surprising but crucial development in the popularization and dissemination of higher biblical criticism in the Anglophone world was a series of British controversies, mostly in the 1860s, over the doctrine of inspiration. Chapter Three chronicles the publication of the collection *Essays and Reviews*, the writings of Anglican Bishop John William Colenso, and the career of Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith. These three events convinced traditional Anglicans that a coordinated campaign existed to introduce infidel Scripture interpretations into the Church of England. The resulting controversies successfully disseminated detailed accounts of a more naturalist understanding of biblical inspiration to an eager popular readership. Protestants in the United States followed these squabbles closely, and consumed a considerable amount of literature on the arguments for and against modernizing criticism. I show in this chapter how the British controversies contributed to scientific biblical criticism by disseminating

throughout the Anglophone world the principle that the Bible should not be treated as the exception to established practices of literary, historical, and scientific criticism. This chapter also introduces a bit of social history into my project, since the identity of these controversial British figures as trusted religious leaders provoked nearly as great an outcry as the content of their ideas.

Chapter Four begins by applying a schema from historian Henry May's research, in which Enlightenment thought became embedded in American denominations in notably different ways. These differences correlated with some movements gravitating toward the center of controversy over higher biblical criticism, while other previously significant actors fell away to become relatively minor characters. As evolutionary thought and new approaches to biblical scholarship entered the mainstream of American society, our careful attention to factors internal to religious belief clarifies why and how Protestant groups established their positions in response to modernism. Guided by the general principle of the Protestant Congruence, many American Christians embraced the natural sciences as religiously legitimate knowledge in the form of a divinely ordained set of fixed laws; little wonder that the evolutionary view of creation as dynamic posed such a threat to this accommodation, and was blamed by conservative Protestants for its challenges to the traditional biblical cosmology. I show here how the idea of a changing natural order proved particularly threatening to the Protestant Congruence, and this popular doctrine revealed itself to be oversimplistic and flimsy, with significant repercussions. While the tensions exacerbated by evolutionary thought had originated in scholarly circles, these debates proved to be interesting to lay audiences as well, and were widely spread by popular periodicals and progressive sermons and lectures.

One of the most significant contributions of this dissertation is a clearer understanding of the new tradition of biblical thought promoted by a generation of progressive evangelical leaders to respond to the challenges of modern scientific knowledge. Although scholars had traditionally been reluctant to discuss the methods of modern scriptural criticism outside academic circles, near the end of the nineteenth century a new constellation of modern academics emerged, committed to sharing a “Bible Renaissance” with the laity. This determination to draw non-scholars into rigorous study of the Bible was one response to the anxiety that American Christians were becoming less religious, driven partly by a small number of vocal popular critics of religion. Chapter Five focuses on the efforts of progressive evangelical clergy and academics working to deepen the American commitment to Bible study by educating laypeople in modern methods and scientific conclusions. Particularly notable in this narrative is Baptist clergyman William Rainey Harper, who gathered a movement of fellow biblical scholars in the formation of periodicals and newspaper columns, correspondence courses, retreats, and Sunday school curricula to strengthen lay enthusiasm for the rigorous study of Scripture. At the heart of Harper’s programming was a fully formed expression of scientific biblical criticism, and a new tradition of interpretation in which fidelity to modern natural knowledge mattered as much as the conclusions it produced. I document in this chapter how the strong commitment to a scientific worldview did not necessarily generate an exodus from Christian belief and practice.

Chapter Six chronicles the rise and development of the negative reactions to scientific biblical criticism, dominated by the American fundamentalist movement, in the early twentieth century. Due to a combination of external social factors and forces internal to its denominations,

evangelical Protestantism in the mid-nineteenth century lost the hegemony it had once held over higher education and intellectual activity in the United States. Provoked by the incursion of modernist Bible interpretation into religious life chronicled in Chapter Five, biblical purists began to find common cause in a reactionary movement transcending denominational boundaries. Under the aggressive leadership of Minneapolis Baptist minister William Bell Riley, these Christian belligerents adopted the name “fundamentalists” and conducted an extensive grassroots campaign, first against modern biblical criticism, then evolutionary thought. Documents from within fundamentalist circles illustrate how they arrived at the conviction that their biblical views were fully scientific by excluding modern developments from their definition of legitimate science. By following closely the leadership decisions of Riley and his contemporaries, I show how the change in fundamentalism’s opponents was rooted in political expediency, as anti-elitist Protestants showed little interest in debating the terms of scholarly criticism. Careful attention to internal sources also refutes the popular myth that the fundamentalist movement essentially disappeared after the humiliation of the *Scopes* trial in 1925; rather, reactionary Protestants directed their energy into creating an extensive, stable subculture of schools, radio programming, and camps and conferences aligned with their own doctrine. By the late 1930s, they had withdrawn nearly entirely from debates over the scientific criticism of the Bible, retreating into a bubble of biblical purism untainted by critical approaches to interpretation.

Chapter One

The Dexter Chair, Theodore Parker, and the American Introduction to “Scientific” Biblical Criticism, 1830-1860

Designing to save men’s reverence for the grand truths of the Bible, I laboriously wrote two sermons on the contradictions in the Scripture—treating of historic contradictions, where one part is at variance with another, or with actual facts; of scientific contradictions, passages at open variance with the facts of the material universe.¹

— Theodore Parker

Introduction

This chapter examines the institutional structure and activity that provided an early foundation for the American tradition of rigorous biblical scholarship and the subsequent efforts to articulate and promote a scientific approach to interpreting the Bible. The former occurred in the establishment of the Dexter Chair of Harvard College, occupied by the most celebrated scriptural experts in the United States, and the latter are exemplified in the scholarly career of Unitarian minister Theodore Parker. As an inquisitive and undisciplined divinity student, Parker wondered aloud why scientific knowledge was subject to testing and further revision, but biblical revelation was understood to be a fixed body of knowledge. This chapter explores Parker’s exposure and response to German scholarship and literature, thanks largely to the lavish foreign library of Unitarian preacher Joseph Stevens Buckminster and the formal institutional support at Harvard for advanced scholarship. This interest led the young student to take the Bible’s contents and interpretation completely seriously and press for exploration more radical than any American scriptural studies to that date. As a founder of American Transcendentalism, Parker challenged

¹ Theodore Parker, “Letter to the Members of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society of Boston” (April 19, 1859) in *The Works of Theodore Parker: Autobiography, Poems and Prayers*, ed. Rufus Leighton (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1907), 287-413, quotation on 320-321.

the claims to empiricism of mainstream Unitarianism and, as a abolitionist firebrand, he also confronted the boundaries of acceptable Protestant belief from a moral position. I discuss here how Parker's vantage point as a scholar of theology, rather than of nature, shaped his understanding of scientific method as an epistemological stance applicable to all knowledge. This philosophical perspective led him to envision and promote a particular understanding of Christianity, in which humanity's understanding of the Bible could be clarified and deepened without limit. This view I identify as the first American expression of scientific biblical criticism, although Parker's American contemporaries recoiled from both his approach and his conclusions.

I rely particularly in this chapter on Dean Grodzin's volume *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (2002) for reflections on the Boston minister's engagement with the world of philosophy, almost completely neglected in other literature focusing on his roles as a Unitarian Minister, a Transcendentalist, or an abolitionist.² Because of this scant representation, I have given especially close attention to Parker's descriptions of science throughout his entire corpus of writing, and how his expansive epistemology set a notorious precedent for later scholars who also wished to consider the Bible open to reinterpretation and accommodation with scientific knowledge. The impact of foreign ideas and approaches on Parker's thought also necessitate a brief survey of the German thinkers and debates that set the tone for his exploration and promotion of methods that shocked even his liberal Unitarian colleagues.

² Dean Grodzins, *American Heretic: Theodore Parker and Transcendentalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), particularly 271ff.

Lastly, I examine here how, during Parker's lifetime, his colleagues spurned this ambitious intellectual vision, fearing the subordination of Scripture to irreligious values and methods. Although his work did not establish a direct lineage of radical biblical studies, future generations of academics invoked him as the fountainhead of a new tradition of American scholarship, in which scriptural narratives could be revisited and perhaps reinterpreted through the lens of established scientific facts. This narrative of Parker's life and career helps to establish the multivalent character of scientific knowledge in the nineteenth century, not only among practitioners of science but also among religious scholars and leaders, who selectively invoked science to bolster their biblical cosmology.

Germany's Role in Setting the Terms of American Biblical Scholarship

British and American academics in the early nineteenth century acknowledged the rudimentary level of biblical study occurring in their own circles, and looked with a mixture of admiration and unease at Germany, where the most innovative and unsettling research was being conducted, earning that nation the label of the "Athenaeum of modern times."³ A significant network of scholars, views, and writings emerged there well before anything comparable had developed in the United States. The various critical positions established and defended by German academics were strongly influential in shaping the terms of American biblical discourse and are thus worth exploring here in detail. The trailblazers in Germany had been inspired by rationalist Enlightenment works emerging from the British controversies over deism, notably the

³ D. Young, "Essays and Dissertations in Biblical Literature," *Princeton Review* 2 (July 1830), 324-325; "Account of the Unitarian Churches in Transylvania," *Christian Examiner and Theological Review* 2 (1825), 262.

philosopher John Locke's *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Paul* (1707). Such sources denied the special distinctiveness of the Bible and rejected arguments based on doctrine, tradition, or compulsion, demanding instead that all truth claims, *including biblical ones*, exhibit consistency internally as well as with external evidences such as geological findings. The contributions of German scholars to the American exploration of scientific biblical criticism were significant and varied, and were met by religious scholars in the United States overwhelmingly with suspicion. A number of theologians, including Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753-1827), Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), Johann David Michaelis (1717-1791), and Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812), incorporated the British rationalist spirit into their own work. Around the turn of the nineteenth century they began to question the traditional, self-evidencing views of the Bible texts, and even promoted the empiricism of Locke's model by featuring surprisingly early expressions of methodological naturalism in their biblical scholarship.⁴

Another prominent development in this narrative was the promotion of historical criticism, first appearing most conspicuously and influentially among a mid-nineteenth-century network of German scholars known as the Tübingen School. Scriptural interpreters had conventionally maintained that the Bible represented a timeless perspective outside the chronology of human experiences, but the historical view emerging after the Reformation depicted Scripture instead as a collection of human narratives, each passage observably shaped

⁴ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism in America*, 15-23 (rational criticism); Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 118-119.

by its origins.⁵ A circle of biblical specialists, largely having either studied or taught at the University of Tübingen, began to coalesce around theologian Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792-1860) in the early 1830s. Challenging the supernaturalist tradition then dominating the Tübingen faculty, Baur and his colleagues synthesized a rational and historical (*historisch-kritische*) approach to the Bible, interpreting each text separately as a product of its particular time and place.⁶ Eichhorn described this synthesis with the name by which it would become popularly, then infamously, known: “I had to exert the most effort in an area not yet explored, the inner nature of the individual writings of the Old Testament, with the aid of higher criticism (*der höheren Kritik*).” English translators of this work simply rendered Eichhorn’s label as “the higher criticism,” and philological scholarship later became known as “the lower criticism” to distinguish it from its notorious cousin.⁷

A number of social and political developments in the German Confederation around the turn of the nineteenth century had helped to transform their provincial approaches to higher education, producing a constellation of more modern universities conducive to innovation in biblical research. Prussian reformers, for example, opened schools under the support and control of the state, rather than the church. Unlike their American and British counterparts, German

⁵ August Tholuck, *Theological Encyclopaedia and Methodology*, tr. Edwards A. Park, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1 (1844), 356; Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 111-112.

⁶ Henning Graf Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation: From the Enlightenment to the Twentieth Century*, tr. Leo G. Perdue (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010), 247, 277.

⁷ Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Introduction to the Old Testament) (Second edition, Leipzig: Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1787), vi; Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Earth’s Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 208, 310-311.

scholars were not required to abide by religious doctrine.⁸ Groundbreaking biblical scholarship could thus be conducted in Germany with less concern about the repercussions for the everyday practice of faith than in other Western nations.⁹

An assortment of overlapping scholarly networks and activity emerged under these conditions in the early nineteenth-century German states, and historians of biblical criticism have typically classified the resulting approaches to scriptural interpretation as either *supernaturalist* or *rationalist* (*Denkglaubigen*), based on how they reconciled the Bible and natural evidence.¹⁰ Supernaturalists insisted on the complete truth of scriptural claims, although in the wake of English deism and rationalism on the one hand and the growing body of facts about the historical past on the other, this faction could no longer maintain their argument solely on the traditional principle of self-evidence. The spread of rationalist and historicist methods in German biblical studies compelled even traditional theologians to acknowledge changing scholarly expectations for philosophical rigor and a factual historical basis.¹¹ The supernaturalist camp was exemplified by theologian Ernst Hengstenberg (1802-1869), whose position had dominated German theological scholarship before Baur began to promote the historical-critical movement. Hengstenberg led the orthodox faculty at Berlin and edited the anti-rationalist theological journal *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung* from the late 1820s. In addition to the significant influence he

⁸ Young, "Essays and Dissertations," 324-325; Victor Shea and William Whitla, "Essays and Reviews": *The 1860 Text and Its Reading* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 55.

⁹ Andreas W. Daum, "Wissenschaft and Knowledge," in *Germany, 1800-1870*, ed. Jonathan Sperber (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 137-161.

¹⁰ Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, 286-287, 296-298.

¹¹ Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 86-87.

wielded through this periodical, Hengstenberg's work also attracted considerable attention overseas, including among conservative Reformed scholars in the United States, most notably the influential Presbyterian theologian Charles Hodge. Hengstenberg's successful influence can be attributed partly to the credible explanations he gave to apparent factual contradictions in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures. In his 1841 work *Die Bücher Moses und Ägypten* (The Books of Moses and Egypt), he also distinguished himself as the first biblical scholar to make use of the significant body of new archaeological knowledge emerging from Napoleon's military campaigns in Egypt.¹²

Historians have loosely classified as rationalist a range of other interpretative approaches, which insisted that biblical narratives be evaluated like other truth claims and be consistent with one another and with evidence from nature and history.¹³ An exceptionally conspicuous proponent of the rationalist view was Heidelberg scholar Heinrich Paulus (1761-1851), who reduced miraculous biblical claims to purely natural terms; one such explanation, for example, treated these wonders as embellished accounts of meteorological phenomena. In general, however, rationalist scholars did not advocate a fully naturalistic worldview but voiced instead more moderate positions, most prominent among them the explanation of miraculous claims as mythology, figurative language, or events naturally occurring under God's general providence.¹⁴

¹² Alexander J. Schem, "Hengstenberg and His Influence on German Protestantism," *Methodist Review* 44 (January 1862), 108-128.

¹³ Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, 204-210, 286-298; Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 118-119.

¹⁴ Theodore Parker, "A Report on German Theology read before the Philanthropic Society in Divinity College, Harvard University," printed in Kenneth Walter Cameron, ed., *Transcendental Epilogue: Primary Materials for Research in Emerson, Thoreau, Literary New England, the Influence of German*

The most influential representatives of German theological ferment recognized the weakness of the supernaturalist and rationalist positions, both of which failed to maintain their influence amid the rapid developments in German scholarship. On the one hand, the supernaturalists risked irrelevancy by refusing to accommodate challenging evidence from the natural sciences; on the other, rationalist arguments were generally unable to withstand the influential critique from philosophers such as Immanuel Kant that reason unaided could not generate a defensible intellectual position.¹⁵

The German theologian Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780-1849) strove to escape the limitations of supernaturalism and rationalism by incorporating selected elements of both. Historian Robert Pfeiffer has singled out de Wette's *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Contributions on the Introduction to the Old Testament, 1806-1807) as the most important work of biblical criticism in the first half of the century, successfully striking a moderate stance between the forces of traditional interpretation and heterodox naturalism. This "mediating" tradition also included the prominent biblical scholar Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and served as an inspiration for the constellation of American intellectuals exploring Transcendentalism.¹⁶

Theology, and Higher Biblical Criticism (Hartford, CT: Transcendental Books, 1965), 2:706-20 (range of German biblical scholarship); Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 69-73.

¹⁵ Frei, *Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 323ff., passim.

¹⁶ Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper, 1948), 47, cited in Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 164; Siegfried B. Puknat, "De Wette in New England," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 102:4 (August 27, 1958), 386-387, passim.

Baur's student David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) rejected both supernaturalism and rationalism as ultimately two expressions of the same misguided assumption that rational consistency was an essential condition of modern knowledge. He did not consider the higher truth of the Bible subject to the standards of rational interpretation but rather encouraged scholars to abide the tensions between scriptural and secular knowledge.¹⁷ Strauss's resolution to the problem of biblical miracles, for example, was to interpret them as the mythology of more primitive cultures, a position that he made especially prominent in his 1835 volume *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus)*, where he noted that these views "betray themselves, by the exaggerating spirit in which they are conceived, to be final, desperate efforts to render the past present, the inconceivable conceivable."¹⁸

The boldness and philosophical rigor of German biblical scholarship generated a notable level of interest in early nineteenth-century New England, where certain theologians showed particular favor toward the Germans' efforts to reconcile reason, history, and Christian thought.¹⁹ Theodore Parker complained that the American conception of significant theological research entirely excluded the Germans: "Who would guess what great things had been done in Biblical criticism? Who would know that De Wette had written profound works in each of the four great

¹⁷ Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, 245-262.

¹⁸ David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus, Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot (London: Chapman, Brothers, 1846), ix.

¹⁹ Puknat, "De Wette in New England," 394.

departments of theology; indeed, that he wrote anything but a couple of romances?”²⁰ Not everyone was as relentlessly curious as Parker, however. Although even orthodox biblical scholars admitted curiosity about these latest innovations in their discipline, many American theological students ultimately found the writings too radical in their approach and potentially too destructive in their consequences. Parker’s Unitarian colleague Andrews Norton, for example, decried De Wette’s work as “German insanity,” warning that “the tendency of German philosophizing is toward impious temerity.”²¹

Harvard’s Dexter Chair: The Institutional Engine of Parker’s Scholarship

One of the most important early steps in the establishment of an American tradition of scholarly biblical criticism was made, not by a clergyman or biblical scholar, but by a wealthy Boston merchant. As a young man, Samuel Dexter (1726-1810) had declined to follow his father into the Calvinist ministry, choosing instead to pursue a significant fortune in commerce and spend his later years dabbling in public affairs and reading liberal theology. Striving both to “defend Christianity against the attacks of the deists and to preserve it from the theological distortions” of the Calvinists, Dexter made a provision in his will for the gift of \$5000 to Harvard College toward the creation of a professorship in biblical research: “if the Christian religion be but well understood, it cannot fail of convincing every sincere Inquirer of its divine authority.” Upon his death in 1810, the Trustees established the Dexter Lectureship on Biblical Criticism, which would be occupied by most of the influential American biblical scholars of the early nineteenth

²⁰ Theodore Parker, “German Literature,” *The Dial: A Magazine for Literature, Philosophy, and Religion* 1:3 (January 1841), 315-339, quotation on 337.

²¹ Andrews Norton, “Transcendentalism,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 11:1 (January 1839), 37-101, quotation on 101.

century.²² Thus, Harvard College, and then Harvard Divinity School after it was established as a separate institution in 1816, provided an epicenter for a slowly spreading “epistemological reformation” of liberal biblical criticism, as well as helping to associate this scholarship with the anti-Calvinist activity that would later coalesce to become the Protestant movement called Unitarianism.²³ The Dexter Lectureship and the scholarly activity surrounding it provide a convenient starting place to trace the development of scientific biblical criticism in America.

Joseph Stevens Buckminster: The Scholarly Bibliophile

Early nineteenth-century American scholarly interest in German biblical criticism can be traced almost entirely to the influence—intentional and unintentional—of one particular *wunderkind*, the Boston Unitarian preacher Joseph Stevens Buckminster (1784-1812). The first scholar to occupy Harvard’s Dexter Lectureship, beginning in the summer of 1811, Buckminster used his short tenure to establish firmly the liberal pursuit of historical and textual scholarship at Harvard, as well as to disseminate a significant library of German biblical criticism throughout New England after his death. Raised in a conservative Calvinist household, Buckminster’s voracious reading soon exposed him to progressive religious views. In addition to the traditional course of study during his bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Harvard College, he was also especially influenced by Joseph Priestley’s *Corruptions of Christianity* (1782) and John Locke’s *Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of Paul* (1705-1707). Both of these works called for a return to the original Scriptures, uncorrupted by ancient philosophies and Calvinist distortions.

²² Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 10; “Biographical Notice of the Late Hon. Samuel Dexter,” *Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* 9 (July 1810), 4.

²³ Lydia Willsky, “Bible Matters: The Scriptural Origins of American Unitarianism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2013), quotation on 18.

Worshipping regularly at Boston's first explicitly Unitarian church, King's Chapel, the young man began to question aloud the orthodox beliefs of his family; the senior Buckminster was so shocked by his son's theological development that he admonished, "you had better be a porter on the wharf than a minister with such views." Despite his father's misgivings, Joseph was ordained and installed in 1805 to the pulpit at Boston's Brattle Street Church.²⁴

Continuing his self-directed theological studies, Buckminster advanced far beyond his New England colleagues and even influenced the work of prominent biblical scholars overseas. Using Locke's *Paraphrase* as his starting point, the young scholar attacked the conventional view of the Bible as an inviolable unity, a position that had discouraged the critical study of particular biblical texts in isolation; he concluded from his research that not all parts of Scripture could be considered equally authoritative.²⁵ While his New England contemporaries were limiting their exploration to the scholarship of English theologians, Buckminster set his sights instead on the radical innovations occurring in German criticism as a means to resolve American sectarian differences over the Bible's singularly authoritative message:

if we would all first satisfy ourselves of the historical evidence of the gospel facts, and then each for himself carefully study the New Testament, and find his religion there, we should not see so many dogmatical, nor so many incredulous minds; ...it is from our having taken our religious opinions from authority, and not from the scriptures, that we see so much uncertainty and contradiction among Protestants.²⁶

²⁴ Eliza Buckminster Lee, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster, D.D., and of His Son, Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster* (Boston: Wm. Crosby and H. P. Nichols, 1849), quotation on 147 (porter on the wharf); Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 10-26ff., quotation on 14 (porter on the wharf); S. C. Thatcher, ed., *Sermons by the Late Rev. J. S. Buckminster, With a Memoir of His Life and Character* (Boston: John Eliot, 1814), 6ff., passim (doubts about orthodox doctrines).

²⁵ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 15-16, 18.

²⁶ Stephen Paul Shoemaker, "Dyspeptics, Mystics, and Skeptics: The Evolution of a Scholarly Approach to Religion at Nineteenth Century Harvard" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2005), 148 (interest in German innovations); Joseph Steven Buckminster, "Sources of Infidelity" in *Sermons by the Late Rev.*

Buckminster also distinguished himself as a preacher whose celebrity allowed him to communicate his prodigious thought widely. So eloquent and fervent an orator was he that the future president of Harvard, John Thornton Kirkland, later claimed that Buckminster had revolutionized Boston preaching. Historian of Unitarianism Jack Mendelsohn wrote that he “occupied so much of the limelight that every other Boston divine moved in his shadow.”²⁷ From his elevated position, Buckminster noted how far behind Europe the scholarship of New England lagged, and he admonished his congregants to bring a careful and critical eye to their own understanding of Scripture: “Take care, my friends, that you do not misunderstand this abstract and difficult subject.”²⁸ The young luminary suffered from epilepsy, and when the Brattle Street congregation sent him to Europe in 1806 to recuperate, he took the opportunity to amass an enormous private library of biblical research. He shipped home nearly 3000 volumes, concentrating in particular on the area of textual studies. Returning home the following year, Buckminster enlisted the Harvard administration in sponsoring an American edition of the German biblical critic Johann Jakob Griesbach’s introduction to the New Testament and adopting it as a textbook at the College. He secured a German tutor that he might fully appreciate the insights of the theologian Johann Gottfried Eichhorn and the Bible interpreter Johann Salomo

Joseph S. Buckminster (Boston: Carter and Hendee, 1829), 142-159, quotation on 148 (historical evidence for the gospel).

²⁷ Jack Mendelsohn, *Channing: The Reluctant Radical* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1986), quotation on 86.

²⁸ Lee, *Memoirs of Rev. Joseph Buckminster*, quotation on 357.

Semler. He also urged Harvard to establish a chair of biblical criticism; therefore, it came as no surprise when he was selected in 1811 to fulfill Samuel Dexter's vision himself.²⁹

Unfortunately, the young preacher did not occupy the Dexter chair for long. He had been preparing his lectures for the fall of 1812 when an especially severe epileptic attack felled him that summer, and he died a few days later, at the age of 28. His interest in German biblical scholarship survived, however, partly through the distribution of his impressive academic library, which was auctioned off in August of that year. Buckminster had arguably been the greatest American biblical interpreter of his time and had firmly located the center of early critical activity at Harvard and among the proto-Unitarian Congregationalists.³⁰ As fellow Harvard professor George Ticknor recalled, "it was he who first took the critical study of the Scriptures among us from the old basis, and placed it on the solid foundations of the text of the New Testament as settled by [Continental biblical scholars]. It has, in our opinion, hardly been permitted to any other man to render so considerable a service as this to Christianity in the Western World."³¹

²⁹ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 16-17, 23-26; Andrews Norton, "Character of Rev. Joseph Stevens Buckminster," *General Repository and Review* 2 (October 1812), 306.

³⁰ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 26, 27-29, 49; *Catalogue of the Library of the Late Rev. J. S. Buckminster* (Boston: John Eliot, Jun., 1812).

³¹ George Ticknor, "Memoirs of the Buckminsters," *Christian Examiner* 47 (September 1849), 169-203, quotation on 186.

William Ellery Channing: The Ignition of an American Scholarly Tradition

If Buckminster's influence had been to introduce New England Protestant scholars to the daring activity of the German theologians, it was his Dexter successor William Ellery Channing (1780-1842) who most successfully popularized this scholarship as part of a distinctively American interpretive tradition. The strain of biblical research initiated by Channing promised a "scientific" (that is, intellectually rigorous and coherent in the sense of *scientia*) application of Enlightenment rationalism to prove the truth of Christianity rather than attack it.³²

Channing purchased a great many of the books from Buckminster's estate, especially those concerning German biblical scholarship, and bought still more from overseas. The epistemology attracting him and his fellow proto-Unitarian Congregationalists was that the Bible, particularly the Christian Scriptures, provided historical proof for a personal God intervening in human affairs.³³ The German examples of this criticism aided Channing and his colleagues in developing principles of "free inquiry" of the Bible texts, rather than allowing church doctrine, creed, or belief system to inhibit their pursuit of truth. Biblical interpretation among Channing and his successors did not involve a slavish mimicking of German higher criticism, but reflected the distinctly pastoral emphasis of American Protestantism to defend the essential truth and authority of Scripture. Drawing also on the philosophy of "Common Sense" realism that had become so prominent in the United States during the eighteenth-century Scottish

³² For example, William Ellery Channing, *Likeness to God: A Discourse Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Frederick A. Farley, as Pastor of the Westminster Congregational Society, Providence, Rhode Island, September 10, 1828* (Boston: Bowles and Dearborn, 1828), 27; Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 28-29, 60-74 (scientific interpretation of Scripture).

³³ Daniel Walker Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy, 1805-1861* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 35-40; Willsky, "Bible Matters," 5, 24-25.

Enlightenment, these liberal scholars strove to liberate Scripture from centuries of human accretions—most specifically, the distortions these academics imputed to Calvinism.³⁴

Because Channing was convinced that proper biblical interpretation could unite the various denominations of Christianity, he was reluctant to abandon the Standing Order of Congregationalism for the nascent Unitarian movement. After all, the congregational autonomy and the lack of a central governing authority in Congregationalism offered an environment conducive to the proliferation of liberal and even radical new ideas, including approaches to biblical interpretation, without the threat of significant repercussion. Liberal Christians imagined their faith under fire from deists, who believed that the natural evidence for God's existence was sufficient and dismissed scriptural testimony such as miracles as superfluous or even ridiculous. On the other extreme, they chafed at the Calvinist doctrines of election and depravity, and rejected the epistemological claim that the mind was inherently corrupt and could not divine truth from the Bible texts.³⁵

³⁴ William Ellery Channing, "On the Present Age," "The Christian Ministry: Discourse at the Dedication of Divinity Hall, Cambridge, 1826," in *The Complete Works of William Ellery Channing, D.D.* (London: Routledge & Sons, 1884), 156-164, 181-188; Mendelsohn, *Channing*, 86-87. As with Baconian thought, there was a broad range of interpretations of "Common Sense" realism in the United States, particularly among the non-scholarly participants in this narrative. Especially useful in assessing the applications of this philosophy were Richard Wightman Fox and James T. Kloppenberg, eds., *A Companion to American Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1995); Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977); and Owen Anderson, *Reason and Faith in the Theology of Charles Hodge: American Common Sense Realism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014).

³⁵ David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985), 30-38; Lydia Willsky-Ciullo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 53-59.

In advocating “free inquiry” during the early and mid-nineteenth century, Channing and his successors promoted four guidelines of biblical interpretation.³⁶ First, the immediate “first impression” of the Bible text provided a sound basis for reflection and interpretation. The influence of “Common Sense” realism is evident here: since human minds were not inherently corrupt, the plainest sense of the biblical texts could be trusted to produce reliable empirical “evidences” for Christian doctrine. Second, one’s understanding of a text, including a Bible text, could change with subsequent readings; this principle was influenced by the Romantic notion that meaning was always filtered through the mind of the individual reader. Third, by providing a connection with the Mind of God, Bible texts offered the only means for generating new revelation. Lastly, this new revelation would not contradict reason, as it was a communication with God’s own rational Mind.³⁷

Over the first half of the century in his career as a teacher and preacher, Channing expressed this approach to biblical interpretation and popularized it to provoke the debates now known as the Unitarian Controversy. Having served on the committee that had originally selected Harvard’s first Dexter lecturer, he was a natural candidate to fill the position after Buckminster’s death. However, under the pressure of striving to fill his young successor’s shoes, Channing’s already fragile health suffered, and he too left the position after only a year.³⁸ Despite relinquishing this influential platform, he continued to promote the free inquiry of the

³⁶ Willsky, “Bible Matters,” 17-19, 34-40; Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 51-91.

³⁷ William Ellery Channing, “Christianity a Rational Religion,” *Complete Works of Channing*, 222-230; Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism* (Boston: Starr King Press, 1955), 89-90.

³⁸ Mendelsohn, *Channing*, 86-87.

Bible in New England intellectual circles; for example, literary critic Margaret Fuller described in her *Memoirs* how she and Channing met weekly in 1836-1837 to read and discuss the higher criticism of Wilhelm de Wette and Johann Herder.³⁹ He was also widely recognized as an exceptionally eloquent preacher, and his long tenure as minister at the Federal Street Church in Boston 1803-1842 afforded him the opportunity to encourage congregants to reach their own interpretations of the Gospel. However, it was through a controversial sermon in 1819 that he wielded the greatest impact on New England biblical studies, and for which he has since been called the “Father of Unitarianism.”⁴⁰

On May 5, 1819, Channing delivered the sermon “Unitarian Christianity” at the Baltimore ordination of the young minister Jared Sparks; this theological bombshell was immediately reprinted as a pamphlet and became one of the most widely read sermons of the nineteenth century.⁴¹ The address examined Channing’s principles of biblical interpretation and described the theological characteristics of the Unitarian Christian movement that had arisen thereon. Transcendentalist intellectual and educator Elizabeth Palmer Peabody noted that the manifesto was “extensively read by laymen everywhere and by young men especially, and it

³⁹ Puknat, “De Wette in New England,” 382; Siegfried B. Puknat, “Channing and German Thought,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 101:2 (April 19, 1957), 195-203, on 198-199, 202; Margaret Fuller, *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1852), I:175-176, II:181ff.; Charles Capper, *Margaret Fuller: An American Romantic Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), II:102, 248, 296, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 52, 246.

⁴¹ William Ellery Channing, “Unitarian Christianity: Discourse at the Ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks, Baltimore, 1819,” in *Complete Works of Channing*, 278-288; Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 69-82; Conrad Wright, ed., *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism: Channing, Emerson, and Parker* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1986), 3-46, 47-89.

made multitudes conscious that they were Unitarian.”⁴² It also exposed this audience to an epistemology insisting that biblical revelations were still relevant in the face of advancing natural knowledge and viewing God’s occasional interventions as part of, rather than alien to, the natural order.⁴³

Moses Stuart: The Retort of Conservative Biblical Interpretation

Not everyone in Channing’s audience that day in Baltimore appreciated the critical manifesto later described as a “theological torpedo,” nor did the much larger readership of the printed version made available within a month.⁴⁴ Although a range of mainstream and conservative Protestant voices eventually condemned the sermon and the fledgling Unitarian movement it had unmasked, no critic was more knowledgeable about the latest innovations in biblical criticism and more influential in denouncing their misuse than Andover professor Moses Stuart (1780-1852), who would be remembered after his death as the “Father of Biblical Science.”⁴⁵ Stuart’s academic home, Andover Theological Seminary, provided an institutional organ and crucible for opposition to the liberalization of Harvard College. Theological tensions among New England intellectuals had reached a breaking point in 1805 when the liberal educator Henry Ware was elected as Hollis Professor of Divinity at Harvard College, provoking moderate and conservative

⁴² Charles H. Lyttle, *The Pentecost of American Unitarianism: Channing’s Baltimore Sermon* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1920), 21-22,

⁴³ Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 75-76.

⁴⁴ Quotation attributed to Unitarian minister John White Chadwick in Lyttle, *The Pentecost of American Unitarianism*, 18.

⁴⁵ John H. Giltner, *Moses Stuart: The Father of Biblical Science in America* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 134-135.

Calvinists to collaborate in the establishment of Andover two years later, the first formal American graduate program for clergymen. Stuart began teaching there in 1810 as Professor of Sacred Literature, and over nearly forty years in that position he taught approximately 1500 future clergy and teachers, including seventy who went on to wield their views as professors or college presidents. From his influential position at Andover, Stuart explicitly strove to elevate scriptural interpretation to a “science” and defend its activity from Channing and his rationalist followers, whose methods he considered reckless and destructive.⁴⁶

Stuart had arrived at Andover with no knowledge of German, but he soon realized how important the language would be in grasping the great works of criticism:

My inquiries, limited as they were, thrust me upon some passages of German contained in the works of German commentators, which were written for the most part in Latin; and occasionally upon Luther’s German version of the Scriptures, as quoted by them. At an age when curiosity, if it belong to a man’s composition, is wide awake, I felt an instinctive desire to know what Luther had said, and how others, who thought and acted with him had explained the Bible.... The sale of the Rev. J. S. Buckminster’s library in Boston threw a considerable number of German critical works into our Library here.... At the present time there are but few German writers of much distinction in sacred literature, which our Library does not contain, and my range has been less circumscribed.⁴⁷

Stuart was especially excited by his introduction to the work of biblical critics Wilhelm Gesenius of Halle, Johann August Ernesti of Leipzig, and Johann Eichhorn of Göttingen. He believed that his ambitious survey of German critical scholarship served the orthodox Protestant cause, first,

⁴⁶ John Herbert Giltner, “Moses Stuart: 1780-1852” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956), 557-559; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 57-65; Mark Granquist, “The Role of ‘Common Sense’ in the Hermeneutics of Moses Stuart,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83:3 (July 1990), 306-307; Edwards Amasa Park, *A Discourse Delivered at the Funeral of Professor Moses Stuart* (Boston: Tappan & Whittemore, 1852), 36-37.

⁴⁷ Moses Stuart, “Letter to the Editor, on the Study of the German Language,” *Christian Review* 4:23 (September 1, 1841), 448-449.

by gleaning the best from even the heterodox scholars; second, by thoroughly understanding liberal biblical criticism as a strategy to refute its claims.⁴⁸

Channing's unapologetic revelation of his position offered the perfect opportunity for Stuart to launch an attack, not only on the leader but on the entire Unitarian movement. Harvard Unitarians had begun to embrace an approach to the Bible they described as "rational" or "moral", in which they privileged the gist of a text, interpreted by the light of reason and common sense, over the written words themselves. This method allowed them to reject or reinterpret some of the creedalism of Calvinism most repugnant to them, a tactic disdained at both Andover and Princeton. Because of the strong tide of evangelical revivalism then sweeping through American Protestantism as part of the Second Great Awakening, in which he had experienced his own religious conversion as a young man, Stuart had to maintain a careful balance in criticizing the "moral" interpretation; this balancing act has in fact confused historians about Stuart's relationship to "common sense" thought.⁴⁹ Like Channing, Stuart chose as the foundation for his position the New Testament passage 1 Thessalonians 5:21, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." Also like Channing, he believed that this principle was an ecumenical one, capable of reuniting an increasingly sectarian Protestantism. Both scholars viewed their work as the rational interpretation of an ultimately rational book, but Stuart would not allow the dictates of reason to overwhelm the plain meaning of the text. In this he was

⁴⁸ Granquist, "Role of 'Common Sense'," 306; Giltner, "Moses Stuart," 133-139, 165-166, 200-241, 400-417, 430-439; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 7-11, 31-45, 75-84, 92-93.

⁴⁹ Giltner, "Moses Stuart," 290-370, 373, passim; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 57-66; Park, *Discourse*, 20-21. Granquist singles out Giltner and Brown as having overlooked Stuart's positive relationship with Common Sense philosophy: Granquist, "Role of 'Common Sense'," 307-308.

indebted to the “grammatico-historical” approach of Ernesti, later also known as “lower criticism,” which considered the grammar and historical context of a passage, but stopped short of evaluating its truthfulness.⁵⁰

Stuart’s lengthy response took Channing to task for his excessive rationalism in interpreting Scripture and for challenging the orthodox doctrine of the triune God and the nature of Christ. Stuart protested that, although Channing had lifted many of his descriptions from orthodox writings, his sermon unfairly depicted the trinitarian position as an “unscriptural,” “irrational,” “absurd” arrangement of three Gods. Stuart in fact agreed with much of what Channing had said about the principles of biblical interpretation, but to the orthodox scholar the minor differences were critical. Channing knew that he and other liberal scholars were accused of elevating reason over revelation, and with the fear of deist attacks on the Bible still a real motivation for biblicists, he had been careful in his sermon to refute this particular criticism. While explicitly not a rationalist, Stuart regularly lauded the power of reason in unlocking the wisdom of Scripture, always mindful to pair it with the uniquely authoritative inspiration of revelation.⁵¹ Stuart singled out Channing’s *overemphasis* on reason for his most impassioned censure:

Reason can only judge of the laws of exegesis, and direct the application of them, in order to discover simply what the sacred writers meant to assert. This being discovered; it is either to be received simply as they have asserted it, or their divine authority must be rejected, and our obligation cast off, to believe all of which they assert. There is no other

⁵⁰ Moses Stuart, *Letters to the Rev. Wm. E. Channing, Containing Remarks on His Sermon, Recently Preached and Published at Baltimore* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1819); Moses Stuart, “A Commentary on Ecclesiastes,” *New Englander* 10 (February 1852), 42-55; Robert Bruce Mullin, “Biblical Critics and the Battle over Slavery,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* (1962-1985) 61:2 (Summer 1983), 211-212.

⁵¹ Giltner, “Moses Stuart,” 311-312, 313ff.; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 57-64; Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism*, 14.

alternative. Philosophy has no right to interfere here.... What does it teach? What idea did the original writer mean to convey? When this is ascertained by the legitimate rules of interpretation, it is authoritative; this is *orthodoxy* in the highest and best sense of the word: and every thing which differs from it, which modifies it, which fritters its meaning away, is *heterodoxy*, is *heresy*; to whatever name or party it is attached.⁵²

Historians of the Unitarian Controversy generally conclude that, although Stuart was clearly the superior scholar, his efforts and the work of other orthodox leaders to refute the Baltimore Sermon failed to rally interested Protestants to his cause; Channing's rational criticism of the Bible and the doctrine of the Trinity had set the terms of debate to a Unitarian advantage.⁵³ As one author observed, "the fear of tritheism has led many a thinker to occupy at times a position scarcely distinguishable from unitarianism.... Stuart's mode of stating the doctrine reduced 'the trinity to a mere unmeaning name'."⁵⁴ For his part, Channing had decided to end his formal involvement in the debate over biblical epistemology; he focused his attention on other concerns, leaving the response to a better qualified biblical scholar, his successor in the Dexter Lectureship.

Stuart spent the rest of his career promoting the properly circumscribed use of reason in biblical criticism. Although he considered himself an enemy of the rationalists, he nevertheless consistently celebrated the power of reason and insisted that biblical interpretation be subject to the same rules and laws that govern knowledge generally.⁵⁵ This systematic treatment was most

⁵² Moses Stuart, *Letters to Channing*, quotation on 11.

⁵³ Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 81-82.

⁵⁴ Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1907), 298-299, 300-301, 307, quotation on 301.

⁵⁵ Moses Stuart, *Critical History and Defence of the Old Testament Canon* (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1845), 1-24; Jeffrey A. Wilcox, "A More Thorough Trinitarian: Reconsidering Moses Stuart's

prominent in his campaign to elevate the discipline of hermeneutics, or textual criticism, to the level of a “science.”⁵⁶

In his response to Channing’s 1819 sermon, Stuart foreshadowed that his interest in German scholars would center on their rigorously academic treatment of the biblical texts:

...in respect to the study of the more liberal (so called) German writers, I fear no injury from it in the end, to the sentiments denominated evangelical. Exegesis has come, by discussion among them, to a solid and permanent science. That the Scriptural writers taught substantially, what we believe to be orthodoxy, is now conceded by their most able expositors.⁵⁷

Three years later, he developed this connection more fully and explicitly in a lecture series on the legitimately scientific status of the grammatico-historical criticism of the Bible texts. In accordance with the Andover constitution, it was customary for the Chair of Sacred Literature, in addition to his regular teaching, to deliver occasional public lectures on the subject before the student body and interested laypeople. In the midst of his several dozen such addresses on general principles and developments in the study of sacred literature, Stuart inserted a series of six specialized lectures in 1822, focused on the basic principles of hermeneutics, or the interpretation of language. Acknowledging that there were not as yet universally recognized laws of interpretation, Stuart strove to raise the field of hermeneutics to a “science” by applying reason and common sense to the nature of language and its human usage.⁵⁸

Role in the Trinitarian Debate in New England, 1819-1850,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Marquette University, 2008), 107-180; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 45-55, 70-74.

⁵⁶ Giltner, “Moses Stuart,” 246 note 48.

⁵⁷ Stuart, *Letters to Channing*, quotation on 147.

⁵⁸ Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 45-52, passim; Giltner, “Moses Stuart,” 189.

Hermeneutics, Stuart began his series, is “that science, which prescribes the rules of interpreting language”; Sacred Hermeneutics, the science of the same principles and rules applied to the Bible.

The basis of this Science, is reason & common sense,” he continued. “And as we admit their authority, in all our conduct & principles, it would be preposterous to reject it here.... I will add merely, that as reason & common sense constitute the basis of Hermeneutics, so any principle which can be shewn to be at variance with these, can never be admitted as a constituent part of this science.

The principles he was intent on excluding were the foundations of all heterodox approaches to interpretation, which he went on to classify as the Catholic, dogmatic, philosophic, and mystic traditions.⁵⁹

Stuart explained to his audiences that the task of “scientific” interpretation was especially urgent in the case of the Old Testament, where the antiquity and the obscurity of its language invited spurious methods of interpretation, absent the guiding rigor of science.⁶⁰

Will any rational man expect to overcome all such obstacles [in the way of a correct exegesis], who undertakes the work, without any fixed principles, or rule of operation? The mariner might as well expect to cross the Atlantic Ocean, & land at any particular part in Europe or Africa, without rules of reckoning, by which he could determine the progress he had made, & his relative situation in regard to his desired port.⁶¹

The pillar of reason functioned in Stuart’s hermeneutical science by establishing the customary usage of words and expressions for each particular author or culture: “just in proportion, as the

⁵⁹ Stuart, “Lecture on Hermeneutics I,” quotations on 1:3. Cited in Giltner, “Moses Stuart,” 260-261, this series of six lectures remains unpublished and its contents uncatalogued. Courtesy of Yale Divinity School Library, microform Ms34, reel 118.

⁶⁰ “Lecture on Hermeneutics VII,” 1.

⁶¹ Stuart, “Lecture on Hermeneutics II,” 5-6, 10-11, quotation on 5.

Bible is supposed to depart from the *usus loquendi*, in just such proportion it ceases to be a revelation.”⁶² The pillar of common sense served Stuart’s project by supporting the reasoning that each author employed language according to the *usus loquendi*—the spoken custom—of his time and place, because he naturally wished to be understood by his audience. Without both of these pillars, hermeneutics would be speculation, and Scripture merely an enigma, inadequate to communicate God’s wishes to Christendom.

The growing prominence of geological evidence for the antiquity of life and the weakening argument for a universal deluge also inclined Stuart to articulate his interpretive science in terms of natural knowledge. Although the biblical criticism of scholars within the natural sciences will be addressed in more detail in Chapter Two, it is worth acknowledging here the geological scholarship that provoked Moses Stuart to censure one particular form of engagement between the natural sciences and biblical criticism. Like his Protestant contemporaries also upholding the Protestant Congruence, Stuart generally assumed that all new knowledge, properly interpreted, would naturally agree with the biblical account: “Who does not know that the latest and highest efforts of geologists, are turning toward the confirmation of the Scripture account of the deluge? I trust the time is coming, when all the lights of science will serve to render more intense, and more widely to diffuse, the light of revelation. May that cheering day be near!”⁶³ However, Stuart disdained any interpretation that sought harmony by identifying contemporary knowledge in Scripture, because it violated the pillar of common sense

⁶² Stuart, “Lecture on Hermeneutics II,” 5-6, 10-11, quotation on 11.

⁶³ Moses Stuart, *A Hebrew Chrestomathy, Designed as the First Volume of a Course of Hebrew Study* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1829), quotation on 118-119; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 66-74, 78-85.

by crediting an ancient author for speaking in the modern *usus loquendi*, which would have been incomprehensible to audiences in antiquity:

Divine Revelation was not designed to teach geography or physics, or astronomy, or chemistry.... What if the sacred writers had spoken in language borrowed from Ebeling, on geography; Newton, on physics & astronomy, Berthollet, on Chemistry; or many writers of our times, on the subject of ghosts, & apparitions? First, who of their age would have understood them? Next, what had they to do, with teaching geography, or physics?... Let every writer be placed in his own age, & if possible, transfer yourself back there, with him. View him in writing the SS [Scriptures] as teaching religion, not science, & then you are disembarassed, in a moment, of a thousand perplexities.

These considerations may lead us readily to ascribe to every sacred writer, views on such subjects, consonant with his character & his age—and to reject the monstrous exegesis which explains him as though he spoke but yesterday, & with all our feelings and prejudices. What can make greater difficulties in interpretation than this; & what can be more unreasonable & unjust.⁶⁴

Stuart's primary antagonists in this issue were his long-time friend and colleague Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), and the Congregational clergyman Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864), who had been Silliman's pupil at Yale. The former had traveled to Scotland in 1805 and been exposed to the debates there over the nature of geological change. Although several generations of contemporary historians have incorrectly characterized the combatants as "uniformitarians"—portrayed as legitimate scientists concerned only with physical evidence—and "catastrophists"—striving to show how their questionable research corresponded with Mosaic chronology—this division is a specious one. Rather, both sides of the argument were championed by legitimate and scrupulous scientists, who differed primarily over whether the rates of geological change could vary widely from era to era.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Stuart, "Lecture on Hermeneutics VI," quotation on 27-28; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 53; Giltner, "Moses Stuart," 258.

⁶⁵ Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 71-74; Julie Newell, "That Nineteenth-Century Geologists Were Divided into Opposing Camps of Catastrophists and Uniformitarians," *Newton's Apple and Other Myths about Science*, eds. Ronald L. Numbers and Kostas Kampourakis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,

Silliman and Hitchcock were both intrigued by the idea that, if the Hebrew word יום (*yom*) for “day” in the Genesis account were interpreted as the amount of time required for a geological epoch, the biblical testimony appeared compatible with the physical evidence.⁶⁶ Each of them had presumed to opine on the terms of proper biblical interpretation to arrive at this agreement, and Stuart scolded their presumption sharply in his own writings. Although Stuart had expressed concern about Silliman’s encroachment into the territory of professional biblical scholars as early as 1824, the earliest extant documentation of their exchange is in his 1829 textbook *A Hebrew Chrestomathy*. Here, Stuart digressed somewhat awkwardly from his explanations of Hebrew grammar and idioms to upbraid geologists straying outside their area of expertise to insinuate themselves into biblical scholarship:

*The Bible was not designed to teach the Hebrews astronomy or geology. Had it been given to them in the scientific costume of the present day. it would have been a book utterly unintelligible. Moses made it intelligible; he designed it to be so. His object was to reveal, to the Jews, Jehovah as the maker of all things, and the object of supreme reverence and adoration. Is not this just as it should be; and just as we might reasonably expect it to be?*⁶⁷

Several years later, Stuart protested similarly when Hitchcock published a series of articles identifying the correlations between geology and Genesis. Stuart responded in 1836 with a long, methodical essay, in which he reiterated his basic principle that the meaning of Genesis is not

2015), 74-79; Martin J. S. Rudwick, “Uniformity and Progression: Reflections on the Structure of Geological Theory in the Age of Lyell,” in *Perspectives in the History of Science and Technology*, ed. Duane H. D. Roller (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971), 209-227, on 210ff.

⁶⁶ Edward Hitchcock, “On the Connection between Geology and Natural Religion,” *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 5:17 (January 1835), 113-137; “On the Connection between Geology and Revelation,” 5:28 (April 1835), 439-451; “The Connection between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation,” 6:20 (October 1835), 261-331.

⁶⁷ Stuart, *Hebrew Chrestomathy*, quotation on 117-118.

determined by its agreement with modern science, dismissed Hitchcock's ignorant use of outdated German sources, and ridiculed the hubris of geology that would "force upon Moses... the conclusions which she thinks herself entitled to draw from her own speculations."⁶⁸

Ultimately, Stuart's resistance was not about harmonizing Genesis and geology, but about recognizing that expertise in one branch of *scientia* did not qualify a scholar to speak knowledgeably about other areas.⁶⁹

Stuart's concern for this disciplinary boundary displays a direct relationship to his work to articulate scientific principles of hermeneutics. The tenets of common sense thought dictated that the essential wisdom of Scripture was apprehensible by all Christians: "No man of common sense, can read the Bible... & not learn substantially his duties & his dangers; his guilt & his need of pardoning mercy."⁷⁰ Stuart's writings in articulating the "scientific" principles of interpretation were intended primarily for the theologian, the scholar who would be treating Scripture critically. In this case, the legitimate interpreter was one who upheld Stuart's two pillars of hermeneutics, reason and common sense, which would naturally disqualify dilettantes such as Silliman and Hitchcock, unschooled in the nature of language and its human usage.

⁶⁸ Moses Stuart, "A Critical Examination of Some Passages in Gen. 1 with Remarks on Difficulties That Attend Some of the Present Modes of Geological Reasoning," *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 7:21 (January 1836), 46-106, quotation on 106.

⁶⁹ John H. Giltner, "Genesis and Geology: The Stuart-Silliman-Hitchcock Debate," *Journal of Religious Thought* 23:1 (1967), 3-13; James R. Moore, "Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century," in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 322-350; Silliman reminisces that this exchange began in 1824 in *Life of Benjamin Silliman, M.D., LL.D., Late Professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy, and Geology in Yale College*, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1866), vol. 2, 115.

⁷⁰ Stuart, "Lecture on Hermeneutics II," quotation on 23-24.

When Stuart died in 1852 at the age of 71, the alumni of Andover placed a monument on his grave, remembering him as “The Father of Biblical Science.”⁷¹ He established the field of Hebrew scholarship in America, founded the nation’s first press capable of printing Hebrew and other Middle Eastern languages, published the first widely used English-language book of Hebrew grammar, helped to establish the first American periodical devoted to the critical interpretation of Scripture, and led the American movement to study German biblical criticism. The several hundreds of students shaped by his lectures and tutorials have affirmed that his teaching was as demanding and groundbreaking as his research.⁷²

Despite his popularity and influence, Stuart’s ideas and activity also generated alarm across the theological spectrum. His interest in German language and learning was viewed with enough suspicion by his orthodox colleagues that the Andover trustees conducted an investigation of this enthusiasm to ensure that he was not slipping into apostasy.⁷³ Stuart’s students, accustomed to approaching the topic of biblical criticism cautiously if not rejecting it outright, were occasionally unnerved by the latest discoveries he included in his lectures, and some found him reckless and too speculative in his positions.⁷⁴ Moreover, the grammatico-historical method promoted by Stuart emphasized the human element in Scripture, rather than the

⁷¹ Giltner, *Father of Biblical Criticism*, quotation on 134-135.

⁷² Granquist, “Role of ‘Common Sense’,” 306; Giltner, *Father of Biblical Criticism*, 133-135; Giltner, “Moses Stuart,” 551-560.

⁷³ Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 26-28.

⁷⁴ John E. Todd, *The Story of His Life Told Mainly by Himself* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1876), 99-100.

nature and will of the Creator, and threatened the dogmatic and allegorical approaches favored by conservative biblical scholars. Despite the widespread admiration expressed for him after his death, many of Stuart's contemporaries ultimately balked at following his scholarly example.⁷⁵

Andrews Norton: A Fierce Denominationalism and Empiricism

Perhaps feeling himself outclassed by the Andover scholar, Channing never responded to Stuart's criticism of his Baltimore sermon; however, Andrews Norton (1786-1853), the other great biblical critic of that generation, did so with alacrity:

Mr. Channing writes against *doctrines*, not *persons*; but Professor Stuart confounds an attack upon opinions with an attack upon the persons of those who hold them; and implies that Mr. Channing has intentionally injured the feelings of his opponents. The distinction which we have just stated, appears to us a very obvious one; but it does not seem to be clearly understood by Professor Stuart.... Mr. Channing speaks with no asperity, but with the temper of a Christian, and with the liberality of a man of enlarged views, who perceives that the character of an individual may be affected by many other circumstances, and some of them perhaps much more important ones, than the errors of the sect to which he may happen to belong.⁷⁶

The profound influence of his thought and writings notwithstanding, Channing had been disparaged after his death by his colleagues for failing to test his ideas critically, as his professional concern had been primarily pastoral. Norton's leadership helped to establish the dominant character of biblical criticism in liberal Christianity as rational but not aspiring to be scientific.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Calvin Ellis Stowe, "Address Prepared by Prof. Stowe," in *A Memorial of the Semi-Centennial Celebration of the Founding of the Theological Seminary at Andover*, ed. J. L. Taylor (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1859), 219-221.

⁷⁶ Andrews Norton, review of *Letters to the Rev. Wm. E. Channing* by Moses Stuart, in *The Christian Disciple and Theological Review* 4-5 (1819), 316-333, 370-431, quotation on 318 (emphasis Norton's).

⁷⁷ Willsky-Ciullo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 61-65; Theodore Parker, "William Ellery Channing," in *The Collected Works of Theodore Parker, Vol. X: Critical Writings, Part II*, ed. Frances Power Cobbe (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 35-71.

Especially when viewed in contrast with Enlightenment deists, we may describe Channing, Stuart, and Norton with the twentieth-century term *supernatural rationalists*, although they would have simply called themselves “biblical Christians.”⁷⁸ Each of the three affirmed the use of reason and observable evidence in understanding Scripture, but they also asserted the necessity of additional revelation. The historical “evidences” of the biblical miracles, rather than inner religious conviction, served as the cornerstone of Christianity in this belief system. The three figures disagreed primarily over where and how to limit the use of reason in biblical interpretation, and these differences constitute the earliest American distinctions between liberal and orthodox engagement with critical methods. At stake for Norton was the defense of supernatural rationalism as the conventional Unitarian position, in which he championed the critical power of reason, a tool that seemed destructive to orthodox leaders such as Stuart. At the same time, mindful of the other end of the theological spectrum, Norton affirmed the primacy of the Bible as empirical proof against the threat of deism and the activity of radical Unitarians who would soon constitute the Transcendentalist movement.⁷⁹

After the brief tenures of Buckminster and Channing, Norton became the next to serve as the Dexter Lecturer at Harvard College and then Dexter Professor after Harvard Divinity School was founded in 1819. For the next seventeen years he used this position as a soapbox to promote

⁷⁸ Conrad Wright, *The Liberal Christians: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 5-6.

⁷⁹ John Herman Randall, Jr., *The Making of the Modern Mind: A Survey of the Intellectual Background of the Present Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1940), 288, 294.

scholarly knowledge of the Bible and insist on the proper methods for its interpretation, so successfully that the School was at a loss to find a worthy successor after his departure in 1830. Unlike Channing, who never relinquished the hope that the rapidly sectarianizing American Protestantism could be reunited through proper biblical interpretation, Norton viewed the difference in interpretive methods as what separated the liberals from the orthodox, and he affirmed this distinction.⁸⁰ Having been raised in an anti-Calvinist household, he was adamant about his mission to free liberal Christians from the false, oppressive dogma of Calvinism:

In past times, the false systems of religion that have assumed the name of Christianity, and ruled in its stead, have had a certain adaptation to the ignorance, the barbarism, the low state of morals, and the perverted condition of society, existing contemporaneously with them. Mixed up with poison as they were, they served as an antidote to other poisons more pernicious. But the time for those systems has wholly past.⁸¹

Norton approached his scholarly duties without the pastoral restraint of Buckminster, Channing, or Stuart, and his blunt, dogmatic, and abrasive manner incurred the dislike of his colleagues and the Harvard leadership, although none could deny his scholarly excellence.

Norton's activity and legacy were shaped especially by the circumstances of the Unitarian controversy and a fierce denominationalism not evident in the writings of his predecessors. His research sought to establish incontrovertibly that the Bible was genuine and authoritative revelation, and that Unitarianism was just as scriptural (and therefore Christian) as those Protestant movements less involved with biblical criticism. The targets of his disapproval included dogmatic readings of the Bible, promoting lazy scholarship; devotion rooted in

⁸⁰ Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 98-105.

⁸¹ Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians, Concerning the Nature of God, and the Person of Christ* (Cambridge, MA: Brown, Shattuck, and Company, 1833), quotation on xvii.

enthusiasm, misrepresenting religious truth as instantaneous, non-strenuous, and fleeting; and the “infidel” theologies inspiring Transcendentalism and other radicalism among religious liberals. As for Stuart and his orthodox colleagues, Norton demanded that they articulate their position and show where it was justified in the Bible, so that readers could judge it for themselves; furthermore, he expected them to clarify what constituted acceptable principles of biblical interpretation, rather than alluding to them implicitly.⁸² Unmasked, these misrepresentations of Christian teachings would no longer be tolerated:

The false doctrines must be swept away. It is not enough that they should be secretly disbelieved; they must be openly disavowed. It must be publicly acknowledged that they are utterly foreign from Christianity. It is not enough that those who defend them should be disregarded or confuted. They must be so confuted as to be silenced.⁸³

Even more aggressively than Channing, Norton set the terms of these debates and claimed the moral high ground as protector of the Bible, keeping his surprised opponents on the defensive.

Norton aggressively promoted supernatural rationalism as the mainstream Unitarian position about the Bible. Although he believed that Christians should cherish every book of Scripture for its historical and poetic content, reason indicated that not every book was equally authoritative, that some portions of the Bible “have continued to embarrass Christians of every age,” a conclusion placing him utterly at odds with Stuart and other orthodox Protestants.⁸⁴ Norton ascribed canonical authority only to those books that could be shown, by internal and external evidence, to have been written by one of Jesus’s disciples; the blade of reason thus

⁸² Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 95-98, 104-105.

⁸³ Norton, *A Statement of Reasons*, quotation on xix.

⁸⁴ Andrews Norton, *The Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, vol. 2 (London: John Chapman, 1848), quotation on 403.

pruned away the books of the Old Testament and many of the New Testament as not critical to the essence and survival of Christianity.⁸⁵ Despite the considerable power he granted to reason in this task, Norton's interpretation did not aspire to be scientific. His criticism qualified as science only in the sense of *scientia*, of being a systematic academic treatment of its subject, and of relying on the biblical miracles and testimony as conclusive empirical evidence. Norton conveyed this exacting approach in reading and interpretation to generations of Harvard divinity students, with the intention that neither the dogmatic idolatry of the biblical canon nor the seductive philosophies of the radical German writers would tempt his charges into apostasy. Eventually his passion for biblical criticism outweighed his commitment to education and defending supernatural rationalism at Harvard, and Norton retired from teaching in 1830 to devote his full attention to research.⁸⁶

Norton continued to defend his supernatural rationalist position from new threats well into his retirement. In 1840 he republished and reviewed the writings by two conservative Princeton theologians, James Alexander and Albert Dod, and took the opportunity to defend his position, not only from the extremes of theological conservatives, but from the excesses of liberals as well.⁸⁷ The retired Harvard professor remained one of the most knowledgeable American scholars about Germany and the ideas and methods contained in its writings, and he

⁸⁵ Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 24, 111-113, 143-144; Willsky, "Bible Matters," 89, 105-107, 111-121.

⁸⁶ Giltner, *Father of Biblical Science*, 97-99, Giltner, "Moses Stuart," 444-445.

⁸⁷ Andrews Norton, ed., *Two Articles from the Princeton Review, Concerning the Transcendental Philosophy of the Germans and of Cousin, and Its Influence on Opinion in This Country* (Cambridge, MA: John Owen, 1840), passim.

had long worried about students' innocent exposure to this infidelity without the proper preparation and oversight.⁸⁸ In particular, Norton remonstrated against the intuitive philosophy of the German Idealists, which threatened to compromise the thoroughly rational and orthodox system of interpretation he had spent his career promoting at Harvard Divinity:

Let us, with all the earnestness of disinterested dread, caution the young American. Under the disguises of romance and poesy, he will learn to tolerate the hell-born dogmas of the young Germany; the mingled lust and blasphemy of Heine, Pückler, Muskau, and Schefer; or, if he wander in these domains as a theologian, the Iscariot Christianity of the disciples of Schelling, Hegel, and Daub.⁸⁹

The specific development provoking Norton's offensive against German intuitive thought was the growing availability of foreign writings in New England, which played an especially important role in stimulating interest in new approaches to biblical interpretation. German language and writings were fast becoming fashionable in the Boston literary circles of the early nineteenth century.⁹⁰ However, as also evidenced by the suspicion expressed toward Stuart's interest, most biblical scholars greeted the "German craze"⁹¹ with wariness or even alarm at the "unholy boldness... and a recklessness" in its sacred criticism, which was "of a deleterious nature and deeply tinged with skepticism."⁹² Although the faddish interest in all things German was first fueled by literary journals, American students returning from study abroad, and a few

⁸⁸ Puknat, "De Wette in New England," 377-378; Willsky, "Bible Matters," 105; Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America: Philosophical and Literary Influences, 1600-1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 73.

⁸⁹ Norton, *Two Articles from the Princeton Review*, quotation on 48.

⁹⁰ Barnas Sears, "German Literature – Its Religious Character and Influence," *Christian Review* 6:22 (June 1841), 271; Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 107.

⁹¹ Pochmann, *German Culture*, 63, 105, 119, quotation on 63.

⁹² Moses Stuart, "Letter to the Editor, on the Study of the German Language," *Christian Review* 6:23 (September 1841), quotations on 464.

native Germans teaching in New England, the trend had become significant enough by 1838 to alarm Norton when one of his former students, George Ripley (1802-1880), began to publish the series *Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature*. This edited collection of French and German writers presented what Ripley believed were “the best productions of foreign genius and study... in a form that shall be accessible to all,” which were received with “encouragement to a degree beyond the expectation of its proprietors.”⁹³

Norton’s criticism concerned a particular common element among the writings showcased in Ripley’s series: they all reflected the intuitionist philosophy providing a foundation for the incipient transcendentalist movement in New England.⁹⁴ Ripley had already aroused his teacher’s anger by using the prominent Unitarian vehicle *Christian Examiner* to praise the English Unitarian James Martineau’s *Rationale of Religious Enquiry* (1836) and attack the supernatural aspects of religion:

The science of theology... has been left encrusted with ancient errors, while the work of purification has been going on in every other department of inquiry and thought. Astronomy has been separated from astrology, chemistry from the search after the philosopher’s stone, medicine from the incantations of magic; but between theology and mythology, a sharp line of distinction yet remains to be drawn.⁹⁵

⁹³ George Ripley, ed., *Philosophical Miscellanies, Translated from the French, of Cousin, Jouffroy, and B. Constant*, vol. 1 (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Company, 1838), quotation on xi.

⁹⁴ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 81-85, 123.

⁹⁵ George Ripley, “Review: The Rationale of Religious Enquiry: or the Question stated of Reason, the Bible, and the Church. By James Martineau,” *Christian Examiner* 21:2 (November 1836), 225-254, quotation on 226-227; James Martineau, *The Rationale of Religious Inquiry; or, The Question Stated of Reason, the Bible, and the Church, in Six Lectures* (London: Whittaker and Co., Simpkin and Marshall, and R. Hunter, 1836); “Article 1,” *Christian Register and Boston Observer*, 15:46 (November 12, 1836), 182.

Because Norton feared for the reputation of Unitarianism and of his own career, he was especially sensitive to *where* heterodox religious ideas were made available.⁹⁶ In Ripley's recklessly offering the intuitionist thought of *Specimens* to a non-academic readership, Norton feared that his former student was concealing destructive ideas within a Trojan horse of trendy writings, disseminating opinions "as vitally injurious to the cause of religion, tending to destroy faith in the only evidence on which the truth of Christianity *as a revelation* must ultimately rest; and... the publication of them in the work in which they have appeared as directly and indirectly disastrous to the progress of religious truth."⁹⁷

Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Naturalization of Miracles

The next major salvo in what came to be called the Transcendentalist Controversy was fired by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) in his 1838 address to the Harvard Divinity graduating class.⁹⁸ To those young men and the gathered audience, Emerson further extended the destructive wake of reason on the supernatural content of the Bible: "[Jesus] spoke of miracles; for he felt that man's life was a miracle, and all that man doth, and he knew that this daily miracle shines, as the character ascends. But the word Miracle, as pronounced by Christian

⁹⁶ William R. Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers: Church Reform in the New England Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 56-59.

⁹⁷ Andrews Norton, "Letter to the Editor," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 5, 1836, cited in Christopher Grasso, *Skepticism and American Faith: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), quotation on 261 (emphasis Norton's).

⁹⁸ Wright, *Three Prophets*, 3-46, 90-112.

churches, gives a false impression; it is *Monster*.”⁹⁹ Emerson rejected the principle that supernatural testimony could qualify as empirical evidence.

In the midst of the resulting pamphlet wars and belligerent newspaper editorials over Emerson’s attack on miracles, Ripley conspicuously chose to include in his *Specimens* the most innovative German biblical scholars of the day, such as de Wette, Schleiermacher, and Strauss, whom Norton suspected of hiding the destructive Transcendentalist agenda within their impenetrable prose. Inspired by these and other writers, a more spiritual alternative to supernatural rationalism was emerging. Central to this development were the questions of whether the biblical miracles were necessary as historical evidence and whether God could be intuited directly without further revelation.¹⁰⁰

Theodore Parker: Incorporating Science as a Philosophical Stance

The Transcendentalist Controversy was an intellectual watershed driven by several sets of factors. Because of poetic celebrities such as Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, many have interpreted it primarily as a literary development.¹⁰¹ However, historian Perry Miller has scrutinized the rise of Transcendentalism as a more sweeping American upheaval, as “a crisis of the spirit and of the nation.” At its core he identified a “religious demonstration” between divergent schools of thought, primarily within Unitarianism, about the nature of religious truth in

⁹⁹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, *An Address Delivered before the Senior Class in Divinity College, Cambridge* (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1838), quotation on 12.

¹⁰⁰ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 185; Hutchison, *The Transcendentalist Ministers*, viii, passim.

¹⁰¹ Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, 76.

relation to the larger pursuit of knowledge.¹⁰² Into this cultural ferment and epistemological battle stepped the young Unitarian minister Theodore Parker (1810-1860), who would use the debate over the necessity of miraculous revelation to address a growing intellectual crisis and offer the solution of a consciously scientific approach to biblical criticism.

A young man whose working-class background could not subsidize his intellectual and social ambitions, Parker compensated for his inability to pay Harvard College's tuition by living at home, working as a schoolmaster and a farmhand, reading the entire Harvard curriculum on his own, and entering the Divinity School in 1834 with advanced standing. His classmates remembered Parker's intensity in his avid reading and study—said to have exceeded that of any student in the history of the school—and his mercurial emotionalism, expressed in turns as a volatile temper, mawkish weeping, barbed wit, or jovial bonhomie. He was idealistic to a fault, holding himself and all around him to high standards and struggling with frustration at their fallibility, and he continued to play the firebrand throughout his career as a radical biblical scholar and abolitionist.¹⁰³

Parker matriculated at the divinity school in 1832, still defending the Bible revelation as verbal plenary inspiration (that is, written by God in God's own words, rather than transcribed by men in their own words) and the miracle stories of the Old Testament as factual. His student writings attest that, during these early years of study, he generally upheld the conventional

¹⁰² Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), quotations on 7-8.

¹⁰³ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 21-22, 41-43.

Unitarian position of supernatural rationalism, which had been persistently defended there by Andrews Norton for the nearly two decades preceding.¹⁰⁴ Parker's serious engagement with biblical scholarship began in his last year at Harvard. Stepping in as one of the editors of the monthly student journal *Scriptural Interpreter* in 1835, and compiling a "Report on German Theology" for the Philanthropic Society in the following spring, he became interested in German biblical criticism and instrumental in exposing his New England colleagues to the work of Eichhorn, Michaelis, Paulus, Strauss, de Wette, and other significant German scholars.¹⁰⁵ His fascination with the rigorously academic writings of these German figures led him to amass more than 13,000 volumes, most in foreign languages, which ministerial colleague Thomas Wentworth Higginson called "the richest public library in Boston."¹⁰⁶ Parker's voracious collecting and reading, so widely known that cartoonists lampooned him for it, provided Ripley's *Specimens* an important means for introducing significant foreign writings and ideas into New England circles.

By the time Parker finished his theological education in 1836, he had apparently begun to relinquish doctrines central to mainstream Protestantism, although his classmates yet detected no signs of his impending radicalism:

Great things were prophesied of him; but it was supposed he would be little more than a scholar,— and extraordinary book-worm. None guessed that he was ere long to be one of the most remarkable men of the day in more ways than one; that the immense fund of

¹⁰⁴ Theodore Parker, "History of the Jews" (unpublished manuscript, 1832), cited in Grodzins, *American Heretic*, passim.

¹⁰⁵ Parker, "Report on German Theology," passim; Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 31-32, 42, 66-74.

¹⁰⁶ 31st Annual report of the Boston Public Library, April 30, 1883, cited in Puknat, "De Wette in New England," 386.

learning he was laying up was but his arsenal of weapons with which later he was to do battle for pure, unadulterated Christianity.¹⁰⁷

Parker's fascination with the bold German critics was already reshaping his theology, and he was beginning to exhibit some of the marks of Transcendentalism. For example, he was coming to believe that the only legitimate biblical miracles were those confirming a revelation and therefore that the alleged prophets did not truly possess the gift of foretelling: "A miracle is never wrought unless the occasion be adequate."¹⁰⁸ He also began to explore the possibility that one's religious response originates in the feelings, rather than in the intellect, blurring the distinction between natural religion and revealed religion: "[Rationalists] may be divided into two classes: 1. such as believe religion to originate in the *understanding* and 2. such as trace it to the *feelings*. The fact that religion does originate in the feelings is one of the grandest discoveries of modern times."¹⁰⁹ This possibility fueled his growing skepticism of the biblical miracles as sufficient authoritative evidence of Christianity's truth. As biographer Dean Grodzins explains, "If religion was a sentiment, then the truths of religion could be proven 'subjectively,' with internal evidence, and 'objective' proofs like miracles became simply irrelevant. If miracles were no longer needed to confirm a revelation, then the whole fabric of supernatural rationalism would unravel."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Cyrus A. Bartol and Christopher Cranch, in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Theodore Parker: A Biography* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1874), quotation on 44.

¹⁰⁸ Theodore Parker, "The Book Of Job, II: The Book of Job is a Poem, Not a True History," *Scriptural Interpreter* 5:5 (January 5, 1834), 226-240, quotation on 229.

¹⁰⁹ Parker, "Report on German Theology," quotation on 709.

¹¹⁰ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 46-48, 70-74, 271-273, quotation on 74.

Grodzins treats the 1842 review of a work by German Lutheran theologian Isaak Dorner as a watershed moment in Parker's development as a biblical critic, and this article also attests the young minister's growing awareness of the need for and possibility of a scientific approach to interpretation.¹¹¹ Parker took advantage of this occasion to append his own "Thoughts on Theology," in which he articulated the need of a new theology, studied with "the method of a science":

The ridiculous part of the matter is this,— that the [theologian] professes to search for whatever truth is to be found, but has sworn a solemn oath never to accept as truth, what does not conform to the idols he worships at home.... In science we ask first, what are the facts of observation whence we shall start? next, what is the true and natural order, explanation, and meaning of these facts? The first work is to find the facts, then their law and meaning.... The history of science is that of many wanderings before reaching the truth. But the history of theology is the darkest chapter of all, for neither the true end nor the true path seems yet to be discovered and pursued.... The reflective character of our age, the philosophical spirit that marks our time, is raising questions in theology never put before.... We do not wonder that the eyes of theologians are turned attentively to Germany at this time, regarding it as the new East out of which the star of Hope is to rise.¹¹²

Although he was still using the word "science" in 1842 to refer to the broad category of *scientia*, Parker's extensive reading included precisely the scholars best able to expose him to the modernization of science: the historian-philosophers of science William Whewell and Auguste Comte. Parker had already developed a particular facility in the natural sciences as an adolescent, when his schoolmasters had nothing more to teach him; ever the autodidact, he spent the next two winters studying natural philosophy, astronomy, chemistry, and algebra. His writings show that he continued to pursue this interest and incorporate the natural sciences into his religious

¹¹¹ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 271-273.

¹¹² Theodore Parker, "Thoughts on Theology," *Dial* 2:4 (April 1842), 485-528, quotation on 492, 493, 494, 500, 503.

scholarship as an adult. Parker owned Whewell's *History of the Inductive Sciences* (1837) and *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* (1840) and referred to them often in his religious work. As for Comte, Parker knew about his research before he was well known even in Europe, and had purchased the first two volumes of *Cours de Philosophie Positive* in 1830 and 1835, respectively, before they were even available in England; the remaining four volumes he purchased as soon as each arrived in America.

Parker was more powerfully drawn to Whewell's descriptions of science than Comte's, for the Englishman was also an Anglican priest and continued to affirm Christianity, while the Frenchman was explicitly atheistic.¹¹³ However, both philosophers impressed Parker with their emphasis on the progressive nature of science, in which its practitioners constantly refined knowledge to keep pace with the demands of modern life, and he imagined that this procedure might also be applied to religion to winnow out anachronisms, superstition, and contradiction:

Now Criticism—which the thinking character of the age demands—asks men to do consciously, and thoroughly what they have always done imperfectly and with no science but that of a pious heart; that is, to divide the Word rightly; separate mythology from history, fact from fiction, what is religious and of God, from what is earthly and not of God.... This doctrine takes nothing from the Bible but its errors, which only weaken its strength; its truth remains, brilliant and burning in the light of life.¹¹⁴

Despite Comte's atheism, Parker was especially persuaded by his model depicting all human knowledge passing through three stages in its upward development: the "Theological," in which we explain phenomena in terms of spiritual forces; the "Metaphysical," the present era of transition, in which we interpret the supernatural as abstract forces; and the "Scientific," in which

¹¹³ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 20, 271-273.

¹¹⁴ Theodore Parker, *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1842), quotation on 367, 371.

we understand our world in terms of universally lawful natural explanations; Whewell also articulated a similar theory of progress for the physical sciences.¹¹⁵

After 1837 Parker was also interpreting all human knowledge as developing in three similar stages but viewing the practitioners of theology as refusing to comply with this natural mode of development:

I know other sciences are advancing; some perhaps have passed already through two of the three stages which all must permeate—to wit, *hypothesis*, *experiment*, and *internal development*—while the science we have all the most at heart—theology, the science of all sciences, has remained stationary.... the critical study of the Scriptures tends to mar the infinite perfection of the present science of theology. Indeed it places it on a level with other sciences, which are improved by casting off all that is erroneous, and adding newly discovered truth; and if this is done, what becomes of the infinite perfection of theology?¹¹⁶

The solution, Parker believed, was to follow Comte's example in applying his "positive" philosophy to new areas, and to practice theology and biblical criticism as the other sciences were conducted. That is, Parker anticipated the transformation of religious thought to become free, progressive, ever-advancing wisdom, a step he envisioned as "the NOVUM ORGANUM of theology," referring to Francis Bacon's 1620 work, which contributed significantly to the development of scientific method.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Auguste Comte, *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte*, tr. Harriet Martineau, volume 1 (London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), 1-3.

¹¹⁶ Theodore Parker, "Reasons Why a Clergyman Should Not Study the Scriptures Carefully and Critically," *Christian Register and Boston Observer* 16:44 (November 4, 1837), quotation on 174.

¹¹⁷ Grodzins 138, 273-274.

Parker's vision of scientific biblical criticism was one facet of his response to a larger epistemological crisis that had been developing throughout the early modern period. Although laypeople would not have otherwise fretted over these philosophical concerns, Parker eagerly studied them and incorporated them into his work as a preacher and religious scholar. More than two centuries earlier, Francis Bacon had envisioned a research program capable of overthrowing the Scholasticism and the skepticism that had dominated medieval thought, enabling such prominent scholars as Isaac Newton to develop natural knowledge on the basis of experimentation and inductive reasoning. However, the success of this program depended on the reliability and completeness of knowledge gained through observations and experiments, and this particular question was hotly debated by philosophers around the turn of the eighteenth century. John Locke's 1689 work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* set the tone for most of the Anglophone philosophical activity that followed by rejecting the possibility that humans are born possessing any innate knowledge. Privileging a realist worldview and an empirical epistemology, he conceived of perception as the human mind apprehending "ideas" that represent the sensible objects of our world. In Locke's model, the mind interacted only with thoughts derived from sensations, which ultimately provide the foundation of all knowledge.¹¹⁸ The crisis arose when David Hume pointed out that this Lockean "Sensualism," as its critics called it, actually undermined the most basic pillars of Baconian inductive science, leaving us unable to justify even basic claims such as the existence of an external world of objects or the reality of causal relationships between them. Additionally, and perhaps more urgent for future religious scholars such as Parker, Locke's model also rendered uncertain all theistic claims, in which God intervenes in the natural world; Hume explained that, if all we know are sense

¹¹⁸ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 62ff.; Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 27-31.

impressions, then the external world is a “fiction,” and God becomes merely a hypothesis.¹¹⁹

Parker lamented the loss of core religious concepts at the hands of this Lockean empiricism:

“Never did a new broom sweep so clean as this new instrument, in the various departments of metaphysics, theology, and ethics. Love, God, and the Soul are swept clean out of doors.”¹²⁰

Two major philosophical responses emerged to this frightening conclusion, both of which had a profound impact on American thought in general and on Protestantism specifically. The first was the school of “Common Sense” realism, articulated most famously by Scottish philosophers Thomas Reid and his student Dugald Stewart; hoping to thwart the corrosive effects of skepticism, these two thinkers reasserted ordinary perception as the human senses directly apprehending an object itself rather than a mental representation of it. “Can any stronger proof be given,... that the evidence of sense is a kind of evidence which we may securely rest upon in the most momentous concerns of mankind?” Reid and his followers disdained the abstractions of metaphysics for the empiricism and induction of Baconian natural knowledge: “I despise Philosophy, and renounce its guidance: let my soul dwell with Common Sense.” Although the tradition established by Reid temporarily forestalled the philosophical crisis, and appealed to mainstream Unitarians such as Norton because it seemed to rescue supernatural rationalism and the reliance on “evidences,” it could not resolve entirely the tensions between sensible and intuited knowledge.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 8-9.

¹²⁰ Parker, “Thoughts on Theology,” quotation on 499.

¹²¹ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 63; Howe, *The Unitarian Conscience*, 31-36; Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (Edinburgh: John Bell, 1785), 108; Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* (London: T. Cadell, 1769), 14.

The second philosophical response to Humean skepticism was the bombshell of German idealism, promoted through foreign writers such as those features in Ripley's *Specimens*, and providing an intellectual foundation for the Transcendentalist movement engineered by Parker and his contemporaries. Parker had turned to German scholarship for a model of how to address the epistemological crisis, and there he found confirmation of his ideas, particularly in the writings of David Friedrich Strauss and Wilhelm de Wette.¹²² He had praised, with reservations, Strauss's mythical approach to biblical interpretation, agreeing that Scripture could be considered neither completely historical nor simply fictional, and he credited Strauss for helping Christians move past both "the frozen realm of stiff supernaturalism, and lifeless rationalism" to the expanses of free religious thought: "We rejoice that this book has been written, though it contains much that we cannot accept. May the evil it produces soon end! But the good it does must last forever."¹²³ However, it was de Wette's emphasis on "feeling," the literary reconciliation of fact and fiction in the form of myth, and the "deep vein of piety" in his writings that attracted Parker and many others connected to the Transcendentalist movement.¹²⁴ The young minister recognized that he and de Wette shared the conviction that the Old Testament miracles could not be admitted as historical facts but rather deserved reverence as mythology:

It must be confessed that the claims made for the Old Testament have no foundation in fact; its books, like others, have a mingling of good and evil. We see a gradual progress of ideas therein, keeping pace with the civilization of the world. Vestiges of ignorance, superstition, folly, of unreclaimed selfishness, yet linger there. Fact and fiction are

¹²² Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 63, 70.

¹²³ Theodore Parker, "Strauss's Life of Jesus," in *The Critical and Miscellaneous Writings of Theodore Parker* (Boston: J. Munroe and Co., 1843), quotation on 304-305.

¹²⁴ Theodore Parker to De Wette, November 19, 1839, Theodore Parker papers, Andover-Harvard Theological Library, cited in Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 70.

strangely blended; the common and miraculous, the divine and the human run into one another.¹²⁵

Parker's notoriety and the scandal over these ideas were established almost entirely through three works produced between 1841 and 1843.¹²⁶ The first was a sermon Parker delivered at the ordination of Charles Shackford on May 19, 1841, in which he issued the prolegomena to what he would call Absolute Religion, titled "A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity." To those gathered he explained that certain elements served as the permanent and essential core of Christianity, while other components were transient, the various forms and doctrines that have accreted in different periods or cultures:

If Jesus had taught at Athens, and not at Jerusalem; if he had wrought no miracle, and none but the human nature had ever been ascribed to him; if the Old Testament had for ever perished at his birth, Christianity would still have been the word of God; it would have lost none of its truths. It would be just as true, just as beautiful, just as lasting, as now it is.¹²⁷

Moreover, Parker included among these transient theologies both the divinity of Christ and the sacred inspiration and authority of the Bible. When all of these trappings unnecessary to Christianity and personal salvation had been stripped away, what remained Parker called Absolute Religion, "pure morality, the love of man, the love of God acting without let or hindrance." There was initially little outcry among the Unitarians about Parker's bold statements; the rejection of transient forms and doctrines was how the denomination had distinguished itself from Calvinism. Only after three conservative Protestant ministers widely republished Parker's

¹²⁵ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 317.

¹²⁶ Conrad Wright, *Three Prophets of Religious Liberalism*, 33-46, 131.

¹²⁷ Theodore Parker, "The Transient and Permanent in Christianity," in *The Works of Theodore Parker*, ed. George Willis Cooke (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1907), 4:1-39, quotation on 19.

ideas in both secular periodicals and orthodox religious journals that Unitarian ministers felt obligated to ostracize their colleague, since actual excommunication was not an option within the free tradition of Unitarianism. Orthodox ministers crowded over this lack of reprisals, denouncing Parker and his denomination by association as deist infidels and unbelievers.¹²⁸

One criticism of “Transient and Permanent” alleged that it had been composed hastily and delivered offhandedly; Parker carefully avoided attracting the same criticism again. When his supporters invited him not long after to deliver a series of five autumn lectures on the themes central to Christianity, he had adequate time to construct thorough and rigorous arguments of his position. *A Discourse of Matters Pertaining to Religion* began with a discussion of the universal innate religious sensibility which threatened to make biblicism unnecessary, a foundation sure to please Parker’s Transcendentalist and intuitionist colleagues and enrage all the rest. This address struck a blow at the empiricism undergirding the position of supernatural rationalism and the claim of miracles as a legitimate form of evidence:

Innate religious sentiment is the basis and cause of all religions. Without this internal religious element, either man could not have any religious notions, nor become religious at all, or else religion would be something foreign to his nature, which he might yet be taught mechanically from without, as Bears are taught to dance, and Parrots to talk; but which, like this acquired and unnatural accomplishment of the beast and the bird, would divert him from his true nature and perfection, rendering him a monster.¹²⁹

Next, he explored the topic of inspiration, continuing in Strauss’s and de Wette’s footsteps by rejecting both rationalist and supernaturalist traditions for his progressively evolving

¹²⁸ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 248-262.

¹²⁹ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 29.

Absolute Religion, in which spiritual knowledge was brought within the bounds of natural phenomena:

As we observe the conditions of the body, we have nature on our side; as we observe the law of the soul we have God on our side. He imparts truth to all men who observe these conditions; we have direct access to him, through reason, conscience, and the religious faculty, just as we have direct access to nature, through the eye, the ear, or the hand. Through these channels, and by means of a law, certain, regular, and universal as gravitation, God inspires men, makes revelation of truth, for is not truth as much a phenomenon of God, as motion of matter?¹³⁰

In the fourth lecture, Parker revealed the contribution of Absolute Religion to the scientific interpretation of the Bible. Rather than revere the book as uniquely divine, or reject it as fictional, Parker extended the methods of natural knowledge to apply to the Bible and its narratives, noting explicitly that the traditional claim of Scripture as self-authenticating was a circular argument and therefore unacceptable. He reflected on the struggle of Protestantism to incorporate the new contributions to knowledge from science:

How much has been written by condescending theologians to show the Bible was not inconsistent with the demonstrations of Newton! But the popular opinion bids us beware, for we tread on holy ground. The opinion commonly expressed by the Protestant churches is this: The Bible is a miraculous collection of miraculous books; every word it contains was written by miraculous inspiration from God, which was so full, complete, and infallible, that the authors delivered the truth and nothing but the truth; that the Bible contains no false statement of doctrine or fact.¹³¹

Instead, Parker urged, “Take it as other books, we have its beauty, truth, religion, not its deformities, fables, and theology. The Bible, if wisely used, is still a blessed teacher. The Bible is made for man, not man for the Bible.”¹³²

¹³⁰ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 190-191.

¹³¹ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 289-292.

¹³² Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 339-341.

Finally, Parker expounded on the future of the church capable of embodying such a religion, explicitly critical of the failure of Boston Unitarianism to do so: “It has not kept its faith. It clings to the skirts of tradition, which, ‘as a scarecrow in a garden of cucumbers—keepeth nothing.’ It would believe nothing not reasonable, and yet all things scriptural; so it will not look facts in the face, and say, This is in the Bible, yes, in the New Testament, but out of reason none the less.”¹³³ He had not yet found a community hospitable to a form of Protestantism in which religious knowledge evolved and was evaluated like scientific knowledge. *Discourse of Matters* was, if anything, even more sensational than “Transient and Permanent” had been, packing Boston’s Masonic Temple with “intelligent” and “highly cultivated” audiences all five weeks. He reprised the series for his own congregation in West Roxbury, and for the lyceum circuit throughout the winter, later estimating that thousands had heard his lectures in one setting or another. When Parker refined his manuscripts for publication, a volume amounting to more than five hundred octavo pages with nearly three hundred footnotes, he had produced what would be the most comprehensive expression of his religious position.¹³⁴

Once Parker had added his footnotes to the manuscript of *Discourse of Matters*, the omnivorous nature of his reading and the breadth of his intellectual synthesis became clearer. He had integrated the thought of an enormous spectrum of sources, particularly the work of Immanuel Kant, Benjamin Constant, and Auguste Comte. Kant’s writings had goaded him into developing further the idea that the human intuition of religious truth precedes our ability to

¹³³ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 426.

¹³⁴ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 263-276.

justify it through reason or evidence: “truth of the human faculties must be assumed in all arguments, and if this be admitted we then have the same evidence for spiritual facts as for the maxims or demonstrations of Geometry.”¹³⁵ From the French political and religious writer Constant, Parker gleaned and developed the idea that religion has progressed historically as the stages of “Fetichism,” Polytheism, and Monotheism, with the transitions between each being ages of skepticism and superstition. It was Comte, however, whose work most obviously shaped *Discourse of Matters*, and Parker’s volume was the first English-language book to promote the French atheist’s ideas. Comte had also commented on Constant’s three stages of religion, classifying them as steps within the “theological” stage of history, which he claimed was already being replaced by positivism. Although Parker gave no credence to Comte’s atheism and rejected the *content* of his positivistic model, he was impressed by its *form*, by the philosopher’s extrapolation of a progressive scientific model onto a completely different area of knowledge. Parker was convinced that religion continued to provide a necessary human institution compatible with the onward evolution of knowledge, and he later felt vindicated when the mature Comte tried to establish a “Religion of Humanity” consistent with his secular philosophy.¹³⁶

Parker also revealed that his skepticism was growing toward the historical accuracy and the spiritual necessity of the biblical narratives.¹³⁷ Although it was not uncommon in Unitarian circles to treat the Old Testament claims as potentially mythological, the New Testament, which

¹³⁵ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 9n.

¹³⁶ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 276-280.

¹³⁷ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 282-284.

featured miracles as “factual evidences” of the Christian message, generally remained sacrosanct to supernatural rationalists. However, Parker’s *Discourse of Matters* reveals that he had relinquished miracles for an innate religious impulse and an utterly lawful universe, since “a transgression of all Law which God has made” would be impossible—“the infinite God must have made the most perfect laws possible in the nature of things... why should he alter these laws?”¹³⁸

Unlike the year before, when Parker’s “Transient and Permanent” had catapulted him into controversy as a relative unknown, New England religious and intellectual circles were now prepared to find impiety in his work, and they were not disappointed. Parker had evidently already burned bridges in these communities, as his 1842 review of Dorner had just been rejected by the Unitarian journal *Christian Examiner* and appeared in the Transcendentalist *Dial* instead. In fact, some readers were clearly letting their assumptions distort their reception of *Discourse of Matters*. In the first major review published, Salem Unitarian minister J. H. Morison lambasted Parker for referring to “the obsolete Religion of the sermon on the mount,” when he had actually described “the *absolute* Religion of the sermon on the mount.”¹³⁹ Even friendly colleagues interpreted his attitude toward the Bible and Jesus as contemptuous and sarcastic and worried about the repercussions of their association with him; for example, Unitarian minister Convers Francis emphatically declined Parker’s offer to dedicate *Discourse of Matters* to him. This growing disaffection of formerly close friends Parker viewed as a personal betrayal.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Parker, *Discourse of Matters*, quotation on 269-270.

¹³⁹ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 280, 312-313.

¹⁴⁰ Gary L. Collison, “A Critical Edition of the Correspondence of Theodore Parker and Convers Francis, 1836-1859,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1979), 19-24ff.

The critics of *Discourse of Matters* often accused Parker of naturalism, although his address had generally refuted naturalism in its promotion of a fundamentally spiritual creation.¹⁴¹ Rather, his address had exchanged the supernatural empiricism of Norton and the generations of ministers he had taught for an idealistic, spiritualist worldview. Transcendentalist Orestes Brownson expressed horror at this rejection of the miracles:

We had both placed the origin and ground of religion in a religious sentiment natural to man; but while I had made that sentiment the point of departure for proving that religion is in accordance with nature and reason, and therefore of removing what had been my chief difficulty in the way of accepting supernatural revelation, he made it his starting-point for reducing all religion to mere naturalism.¹⁴²

Brownson's shock over this apostasy contributed to his departure from Unitarianism and conversion to Catholicism in 1844. Other Unitarian colleagues, despite their own ambivalence about the historical fact of the miracles, responded in less dramatic fashion but also used the language of naturalism to describe Parker's infidelity. Historian Charles Cashdollar has described Parker's theological tendency as "theistic naturalism," in which the preacher insisted on the relevance and the fundamentally scientific lawfulness of the religious impulse.¹⁴³ The difficulty in classifying Parker's position lies in the fact that he did not consider his anti-supernaturalism in conflict with his basic spiritualism.

¹⁴¹ Henry Steele Commager, *Theodore Parker: Yankee Crusader* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1982), 86; John White Chadwick, *Theodore Parker: Preacher and Reformer* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 394.

¹⁴² Orestes Brownson, *The Convert; or, Leaves from My Experience* (New York: Edward Dunigan & Brother, 1857), 345.

¹⁴³ Charles D. Cashdollar, "European Positivism and the American Unitarians," *Church History* 45:4 (December 1976), 494.

Parker produced his last major work of biblical criticism in 1843, the magnum opus he had labored over since he had graduated from Harvard seven years earlier.¹⁴⁴ He had come to know de Wette's work as he was preparing the "Report on German Theology" for Harvard's Philanthropic Society and as one of the editors of the *Scriptural Interpreter*. Indeed, Moses Stuart had encouraged him to try his hand at translating it. Originally conceived as an English publication of *Einleitungen die kanonischen und apokryphischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Introduction to the Canonical and Apocryphal Books of the Old Testament, 1806-1807), the project soon ballooned to include considerable commentary and a "huge appendix."¹⁴⁵ Parker aimed to introduce de Wette to his colleagues as a biblical critic, since American clergy and theological students had only encountered the German scholar in translation as a theologian and moralist.

Published as *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament*, Parker's project strove to make biblical scholarship accessible to Americans who lacked facility in languages or access to the original sources. He included the full text of each passage to which de Wette had referred, along with the English translation of quotations originally given only in foreign tongues, with the completed volume sprawling to fill 1100 quarto pages. De Wette had been the first Old Testament scholar to use critical methods in challenging the biblical depictions of the Israelite religion, and for the Unitarians this work

¹⁴⁴ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 70, 79.

¹⁴⁵ Theodore Parker to William Silsbee, May 19, 1838, Massachusetts Historical Society, cited in Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 133.

proved useful in establishing much of the Hebrew Scriptures as myth.¹⁴⁶ Even Andrews Norton singled out de Wette for praise in the midst of attacking the “modern German school of infidelity,” writing, “no theologian of the German school had more direct influence on opinion out of Germany.”¹⁴⁷ For Parker, the enormous collection of historical information justified his challenge of the empiricism of the supernatural rationalists and helped to establish that “religion does originate in the feelings,” thus securing his Absolute Religion on a spiritualist foundation.¹⁴⁸

Parker had hoped that his *Critical and Historical Introduction* would be just the first of many similar scholarly works, but it remained his only book of this kind. Although three editions were printed over the next fifteen years, the volume never received much attention in the United States. It generated no great controversy, as Parker’s more popular scholarship had, and his lasting legacy was established instead by the next and final chapter in his life.¹⁴⁹ Despite his reputation as the greatest scholar of his generation of New England clergy, outside of Unitarian circles Parker’s legacy as a biblical critic is overshadowed by his reputation as an abolitionist.¹⁵⁰ One historian has noted that the Transcendentalist movement marked a crucial moment in American life when moral questions necessitated political answers.¹⁵¹ Provoked by the Mexican-

¹⁴⁶ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 372-373; David K. Nartonis, “How the Philosophy of Science Changed Religion at Nineteenth-Century Harvard,” *Zygon* 43:3 (September 2008), 644-645.

¹⁴⁷ Andrews Norton, *Tracts Concerning Christianity* (Cambridge: John Bartlett, 1852), quotation on 278.

¹⁴⁸ Parker, “Report on German Theology,” *passim*, quotation on 709.

¹⁴⁹ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, 374.

¹⁵⁰ Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987, c1927), 417.

¹⁵¹ Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, 83.

American War and then the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, Parker responded by devoting the second half of his life to the abolitionist cause: “I was meant for a philosopher, and the times call for a *stump orator*... I wish to go down to posterity, as far as I shall go at all, with the anti-slavery sermons and speeches in my right hand.”¹⁵² The biblical research he had done as a young man, which contributed to his idealist theology and his understanding of religion originating in the feelings, provided the spiritual foundation for his militant anti-slavery. Parker and other proponents, known as the New Romantics, viewed the faculty of intuition as a window into a higher, universal moral law and a source of emotional suasion to challenge unethical human laws.¹⁵³

Conclusion: A Prophet without Followers

As this chapter has shown, minister and biblical scholar Theodore Parker cultivated an ambitious vision of the scientific interpretation of Scripture, in which the book was treated like any other object of study. Exposed to an unusually rich library and news of the latest Continental scholarship during his years at Harvard Divinity School, the young man eagerly availed himself of a broad range of scholarly writings, including many works scarcely even known in Europe and Britain. In addition to reading the most significant German works of biblical scholarship, Parker also sought in the sciences an approach that might transform the stagnant world of religious thought. In particular, he had acquired his advanced understanding of the subject from the

¹⁵² Chadwick, *Theodore Parker*, quotation on 278; John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker, Minister of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1864), Volume II, quotation on 115.

¹⁵³ Michael Fellman, “Theodore Parker and the Abolitionist Role in the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 61:3 (December 1974), 668-669.

philosophers of science Auguste Comte and William Whewell, coming to understand science not as disciplines of practice, but as an epistemological stance—as a claim of what constituted legitimate knowledge and how it could be attained. Unlike his contemporaries, who considered science a perspective external to biblical knowledge, Parker treated science and the Bible as branches of knowledge internal to the same epistemological endeavor.

Parker's philosophical understanding of science placed him at odds with his less inquisitive religious colleagues, who held the popular conception of science as knowledge gained only by direct sensory observation. Most conspicuously out of step with his contemporaries was Parker's embrace of the use of hypothesis, widely assumed by non-experts to be inadmissible in scientific method. His vision of how scientific knowledge could constructively intersect with biblical knowledge was explicitly informed by this admission of provisional explanations in the development of knowledge. Parker was particularly exhilarated by the prospect of extending the ongoing refinement of scientific knowledge to the world of theology and biblical study, such that they too could be improved by new discoveries.

Historians have generally interpreted Parker's pursuit of a "scientific" tradition of biblical criticism as a failed effort, since America's most radical scriptural scholar died in 1860 with no clear successors stepping forward to extend his labors.¹⁵⁴ Contemporaries were alienated from his efforts for a number of reasons. First, his vision of theology and biblical knowledge as bodies of knowledge that were not firmly established but still evolving was profoundly threatening to scholars and clergy who interpreted the unchanging certainty of these disciplines as a necessary

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Rise of Biblical Criticism*, 170.

foundation to Christian faith. Second, the sciences were undergoing significant change during Parker's lifetime, and his critics feared reliance on such a green and untested body of knowledge and methods, and this skepticism was even more powerful toward science in its hypothesizing form. Third, his religious colleagues also wrestled with whether they could accept the ontological implications of Parker's suggested methods, specifically the perceived threat of anti-supernaturalism present in the most radical German criticism. Fourth, Whewell's writings had also inspired Parker to adopt the principle that observed evidence was not enough for the acquisition of knowledge, but needed to be buttressed by "necessary ideas," which could be known only intuitively; mainstream Unitarian colleagues in particular were alienated by this threat to their position of supernatural rationalism.¹⁵⁵ Lastly, Parker's unseemly belligerence in the abolitionist cause embarrassed the class-conscious Unitarians, and left him even more unwelcome among his colleagues. Additionally, biblical scholar Robert Funk has noted that Parker's efforts were "doomed to failure" as they coincided with the broader shift of theological debates away from biblical claims as facts; the nation's emerging critical tradition, once depending so heavily on Unitarian biblicism, had "died aborning."¹⁵⁶

However, as subsequent chapters of this dissertation will show, proponents and opponents of modern biblical scholarship during America's late nineteenth-century "crisis of faith" looked back to Parker as one fountainhead from which new interpretive approaches had emerged. Parker's ambition to create a scientific biblical criticism was part of a larger

¹⁵⁵ Grodzins, *American Heretic*, quotation on 272.

¹⁵⁶ Robert W. Funk, review of Brown, *Church History* 39:3 (September 1970), quotations on 415 (doomed to failure, died aborning); Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America*, x (biblical claims as facts).

conversation in the early nineteenth century about the nature of knowledge and humanity's knowledge of nature. Although his critics regularly accused him of "naturalism," it was the *methods* of the natural sciences, rather than their content and conclusions, that Parker admired and wanted to import into biblical criticism. His goal of Absolute Religion, freed from the transient accretions of dogmatic theology, would be free to evolve with humanity's changing needs, just as the natural sciences evolved.

Chapter Two

The Reception of Scientific Biblical Criticism among American “Men of Science,” 1820-1860

*With the Bible in my hands, and the world before me, I think I perceive a perfect harmony between science and revealed religion. It is devoutly to be desired that this harmony should be perceived and acknowledged by all the friends of truth; and it is my mature conviction that a full and just comprehension of the works as well as the word of God, will conduct all honest and intelligent minds to the same conclusion.*¹

— Benjamin Silliman

Introduction

While Chapter One focused on the development of Bible interpretation emulating the cumulative character of scientific knowledge and responses to this innovation among American clergy and theological faculty, Chapter Two will explore the range of attitudes toward the intersection of biblical knowledge and scientific knowledge among scientific practitioners in the United States. The development of new terminology and categories during the mid-nineteenth century to describe the serious study of nature increased the status and accessibility of these emerging disciplines, necessitating a closer look at whether this exploration and its conclusions were fully compatible with the biblical account of the world. This chapter follows the geologists, astronomers, biologists, and anthropologists most influential in promoting new levels of accommodation between the Bible and the sciences, also chronicling how the shifting categories of scientific activity gave new urgency to the construction of a worldview supportive of both scientific commitments and Protestant piety.

¹ Benjamin Silliman to Rev. Gardiner Spring, July 24, 1854, in *Life of Benjamin Silliman, M.D., LL.D., Late Professor of Chemistry, Mineralogy, and Geology in Yale College*, edited by George P. Fisher (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1866), vol. 2, 147-148, quotation on 148.

Although there exists a considerable literature about the intersection of science with religion writ large, far fewer authors address specifically the relationships between the Bible and scientific knowledge. A number of excellent general works helped me to assemble a clearer basic picture of how biblical cosmology and scientific cosmology occupy the history of the United States, thanks to the collaborative authorial and editorial efforts of a generation of historians now nearing retirement: David Lindberg, Ronald Numbers, Peter Harrison, and Michael Shank. Their contributions include: *God and Nature* (1986), *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (1998), *When Science and Christianity Meet* (2003), *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew* (2007), and *Wrestling with Nature* (2011).²

To arrive at a more detailed understanding of the American accommodation of science with the Bible specifically, I relied more heavily on histories of the specific scientific disciplines. In geology, for example, the prolific Martin J. S. Rudwick has contributed *The Meaning of Fossils* (1976), *Worlds before Adam* (2008), and *Earth's Deep History* (2014), as well as several very significant articles.³ In astronomy and cosmogony, Numbers's dissertation research, published as *Creation by Natural Law* (1977), established an area of study that still remains

² David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism, and the Rise of Natural Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *When Science and Christianity Meet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Ronald L. Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Peter Harrison, Ronald L. Numbers, and Michael H. Shank, eds., *Wrestling with Nature: From Omens to Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

³ Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Paleontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), *Worlds before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), *Earth's Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).

woefully underdeveloped; as such, I relied especially heavily on primary sources on this topic.⁴

In the biological sciences, Rudwick's works continued to be foundational, as well as Numbers's edited volume with Denis Alexander, *Biology and Ideology* (2010).⁵ The study of humanity's origins and the concept of race reveal a considerable gap in the literature, as Winthrop D. Jordan's *White over Black* (1968) and Reginald Horsman's *Race and Manifest Destiny* (1981) remain significant, followed decades later by George Frederickson's *The Black Image in the White Mind* (1987), Lester Stephens's *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South* (2000), and David Livingstone's *Adam's Ancestors* (2008). The work done on this topic in Blair Nelson's unpublished dissertation "Infidel Science!" (2014) points toward an area in serious need of further development, specifically by historians of science.⁶

This chapter pushes beyond the extant literature in chronicling how Protestant practitioners of science constituted a network more inclined to embrace and promote reinterpretations of the Bible to reflect what they considered firmly established and trustworthy knowledge about nature. I demonstrate how, rather than philosophizing about science from the

⁴ Ronald L. Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977).

⁵ Denis R. Alexander and Ronald L. Numbers, eds., *Biology and Ideology: From Descartes to Dawkins* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁶ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987); Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); David N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); G. Blair Nelson, "Infidel Science! Polygenism in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Weekly Religious Press," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014).

outside as Parker had, these experienced students of nature engaged with science as the practice of experimental activity, drawing conclusions at the local level but aspiring to generalize lawful behavior to all of creation. Their scientifically informed alterations to the Genesis narrative established an important precedent for reinterpreting Scripture, which so satisfyingly resolved points of conflict that they were readily embraced beyond the circle of scientific practitioners, particularly by enthusiastic laypeople enjoying popular science. Because the boundary between the elite scientific scholar and the reading public was not defended as fiercely as in the religious world, the popular media enthusiastically provided new opportunities for the literate public to explore these questions as a wholesome leisure activity. Finally, with the precedent of reinterpreting the Bible to accommodate external forms of knowledge, these scientific practitioners successfully extended the increasing practice of methodological naturalism to successive interpretations of Scripture's messages.

The Influence of Protestant Culture on the Production of Scientific Knowledge

It is unsurprising that, in an overwhelmingly Protestant nation, the accommodation of science and the Bible proceeded from a Protestant worldview, with two central principles: that God had created nature and left abundant evidence of this involvement, and that additional information about God was communicated to humanity in the Holy Bible.⁷ As Protestants generally agreed that the Creator spoke directly to humanity through both the “natural revelation” of the material world and “special revelation” of the biblical world, they appealed to information from both spheres as factual evidence. Two particular models of religious epistemology, *natural theology*

⁷ Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), ix-xii.

and *biblical theology*, had flourished since the eighteenth century and aided harmonizers in accommodating this bicameral cosmology. Natural theology, the deduction of God's existence and attributes through reason and evidence in nature, found considerable favor among scholars and laypeople in affirming how their religious and scientific knowledge could be expected to agree and reinforce one another, contributing to the popularity of the Protestant Congruence. More germane to the particular topic of this dissertation is biblical theology, in which the texts of the Bible were given special authority as revelation about the character of reality, and it was on this branch of knowledge that the fiercest controversies over accommodation were focused.⁸ One of the central principles of Protestantism, *sola scriptura* (by Scripture alone), dictated that the words of the Bible were self-authenticating, intelligible, and sufficient, and therefore provided believers a trustworthy and accessible foundation of knowledge. Especially in Presbyterian and Baptist denominations, where it was not dictated that Scripture be tempered and illuminated by the additional authorities of church leadership or tradition, the Bible was consulted in matters about the natural order as well as the spiritual one.⁹

The timeframe of this dissertation was chosen to benefit from the abundant resources afforded by the shifting language and categories in the mid-nineteenth century for the study of

⁸ George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219-264, on 231-234.

⁹ John Hedley Brooke, "Natural Theology," in *The History of Science and Religion in the Western Tradition: An Encyclopedia*, eds. Gary B. Ferngren et al. (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 2000), 67-74; Jonathan R. Topham, "Natural Theology and the Sciences," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59-79; Edward B. Davis and Michael P. Winship, "Early-Modern Protestantism," in Ferngren, ed., *History of Science and Religion*, 321-328.

the natural world. The concepts of science and the sciences, the roles of those who studied them, and the institutions and social structures that housed this activity developed considerably in the United States over the nineteenth century. The Protestant hegemony over the American intellectual landscape significantly shaped the interpretation of natural evidence by scholars and non-scholars alike. Especially after the perceived intellectual excesses of the Enlightenment, both religious progressives and conservatives insisted that inquiry be restricted to the explicit facts, and that hypotheses and other “speculation” be disallowed.¹⁰ In the early nineteenth century, students of nature seized on the exemplar of Francis Bacon for a prudent and trustworthy approach to generating knowledge, although in practice this existed primarily as a form of rhetoric rather than a rigorous method. American enthusiasts in the 1820s and 1830s expressed considerable excitement about how the “Baconian” method promised to be compatible with Christian belief and inhospitable to the Enlightenment infidelities of deism and atheism.¹¹ The practical value of the Baconian rhetoric was that it allowed Protestants to maintain that their religious beliefs also accommodated a complete and accurate scientific worldview, because the Bible’s claims could be cited as facts rather than opinions.¹² This development helped to demonstrate how widespread the Protestant Congruence became, as faithful enthusiasts of nature regularly spoke of Scripture as evidence equivalent to scientific facts.¹³

¹⁰ Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America*, ix-xii, 17-27ff.

¹¹ George H. Daniels, *American Science in the Age of Jackson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 6-101.

¹² Theodore Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 3-31, passim.

¹³ Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 41-42.

Constituting an important thread running through any narrative about science and religion in the nineteenth century are the acknowledgment of significant changes in the meaning of the word *science*. Before mid-century, the term was commonly used to describe the systematic study of the laws or principles of practically any subject, often explicitly contrasted with the empirical approach to study. After the middle of the century, however, *science* began to replace natural history and natural philosophy as the term for the study of the material world, especially with an emphasis on the observation of physical evidence.¹⁴ Reassured by the Protestant Congruence in the same way that theologians had assumed that their religious worldview also accommodated a complete scientific worldview, students of nature began to explore the possibility that natural explanations for phenomena posed no threat to Christian belief. The range of natural exploration included within the term *science* thus occupied a broad and uneasy spectrum of knowledge and practice, spanning from craft and technical expertise to philosophy and metaphysics, but with the gradual preference for material evidences, philosophical consistency, and universal applicability.¹⁵

No less unstable and porous than the language of *science* were descriptions of its practitioners. Naturalists in Britain and America struggled with the vocabulary to describe the various roles they occupied and the changing status of their disciplines. Because the study of

¹⁴ Sidney Ross, "Scientist: The Story of a Word," in *Nineteenth-Century Attitudes: Men of Science* (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer Science & Business Media: 1991), 1-39; Daniel Patrick Thurs, *Science Talk: Changing Notions of Science in American Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 1-21, passim.

¹⁵ Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 133-135.

nature in the mid-modern era was dominated by men, the term *men of science* remained a favorite through the middle of the nineteenth century. British philosopher William Whewell, the guiding light to Theodore Parker's quest for a scientific theology, suggested the neologisms *scientist* and *physicist* in the 1830s and 1840s. British scholars resisted these innovations as ungainly and continued to hold to *men of science* until about 1910, when they generally agreed that it was too late stop the momentum of Whewell's coined words. *Scientist* was much more readily adopted in the United States and began to appear regularly in American periodicals from the early 1850s. The solidifying definition of *scientist* as a full-time, university-educated professional also reinforced certain meanings of *science*, as well as influencing which studies were eventually excluded from the category, such as phrenology and mesmerism.¹⁶

The professionalization of science and the scientist created a new social authority capable of challenging the privileged place of clergy and religious scholars. Although the grip of Christianity over American education remained strong, it was gradually accompanied by more secular expressions of Protestant culture, and clerical university presidents, professors, and tutors became an increasingly rare breed. College campuses hired full-time scientists and science educators, and between the late 1840s and 1870, more than thirty-five schools established science departments. The original Morrill Act of 1862 authorized the financial foundation for an immense constellation of colleges and universities with an emphasis on practical education and training, rather than the classical curriculum of traditional higher education.¹⁷ Scientific

¹⁶ Ross, "Story of a Word," 8-23.

¹⁷ Veysey, *Emergence of the American University*, 133-135; Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 21-71.

publications, such as *Scientific American* and *Popular Science Monthly*, emerged mid-century to communicate and encourage discoveries, inventions, and collaborative inquiry to a surprisingly broad spectrum of enthusiasts. A spectacular growth in popular science, promoted not only in print but also in public lectures and demonstrations, drew many non-scholars, and a significant number of women, into the “doxological science” of the Protestant Congruence.¹⁸ An extensive network of professional organizations, most notably the American Association for the Advancement of Science, oversaw the proliferation of disciplinary qualifications and promoted the category of the scientific professional in contrast with mere hobbyists. These developments intensified the impression that the uniquely respected social role of the religious leader now faced serious competition from the scientific professional.¹⁹ Although many scholars of nature or the Bible succumbed to the persistent message that science and religion were unavoidably at war for intellectual and cultural primacy, most nineteenth-century men of science remained devoted Protestants, even as they fashioned careers entirely on the exploration of nature and the use of natural explanations.²⁰

Observant Christians who wanted to devote themselves to study, writing, and teaching about the natural world were often obligated to strike a balance between explaining the order of nature on its own terms and defending their religious identity. Although pious Americans,

¹⁸ Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 71-131; Deborah Jean Warner, “Science Education for Women in Antebellum America,” *Isis* 69:1 (March 1978), 58-67.

¹⁹ James Turner, *Without God, Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 121-125.

²⁰ David N. Livingstone, “Re-placing Darwinism and Christianity,” in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. Lindberg and Numbers, 183-202, on 191ff.

especially religious leaders, commonly expressed a fear of atheism and freethought, in reality it was rare to encounter an actual unbeliever, as the nation tolerated little heterodoxy.²¹ Much more frequent was it to hear the deists, minor skeptics, or even those exhibiting immoral behavior, disparaged as atheists. Protestant men of science did not, as some feared, relinquish all their religious belief for a purely materialist belief system; this extreme position of *metaphysical naturalism* appeared more often in philosophical discussions and rhetorical barbs than in the practice of science. Rather, what has come to be known problematically as *methodological naturalism*, the practice of preferring natural explanations in the study of the natural world, has become an established tradition among scientific practitioners.²² Historically, methodological naturalism has not been expressed as a form of naturalism or even a methodology, but rather an informal practice and a form of rhetoric, not unlike the claimed adherence to “Baconian” science. This disciplinary custom allowed serious students of nature to maintain their Christian identity while exploring and proposing surprisingly bold explanations of the natural world. Points of particular controversy in this balancing act have included: the age of the earth and of the universe, the formation of the cosmos, the appearance, efflorescence, and interdependence of life, and the origin of humanity with apparently unique rational and moral capacity and responsibilities. In navigating these and less prominent conflicts between natural knowledge and biblical knowledge, American explorers of nature developed and evaluated a number of creative forms of intellectual reconciliation.²³

²¹ Turner, *Without God*, 2, 26, 46-47, 70; Nathan G. Alexander, *Race in a Godless World: Atheism, Race, and Civilization, 1850–1914* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2019), 13-24.

²² Alan G. Padgett, “Practical Objectivity: Keeping Natural Science Natural,” *The Blackwell Companion to Science and Christianity*, eds. J. B. Stump and Alan G. Padgett (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 93-102.

²³ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 40ff.

Cultivating Naturalistic Spaces within the Biblical Worldview

Addressing the creation of the heavens and the earth, the subjects of astronomy and geology were the two natural sciences most obviously related to the biblical account of creation. For this reason they were also the two disciplines most appealing to non-specialist audiences in early nineteenth-century America.²⁴ The New York physician and natural historian Samuel Metcalf wrote in 1834 that geology had become “the fashionable science of the day,”²⁵ offering to even the humblest mind “sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, and good in every thing.”²⁶ The study of nature’s abundance and complexity also offered more than entertaining diversion; Metcalf reassured his readers that geology was “not an object of merely amusing speculation,... [but] highly important in a practical point of view.”²⁷ Furthermore, the pursuit of geological science did not invite infidelity, as some had worried; rather, enthusiasts noted that it “enlarges our conceptions of the boundless wisdom of the Creator, and of the unalterable laws by which He governs the universe, exalts our faith and purifies our adoration.”²⁸

²⁴ Ronald L. Numbers, “Natural Science and Revealed Religion,” forthcoming, 20.

²⁵ Samuel Lytler Metcalf, “The Interest and Importance of Scientific Geology as a Subject for Study,” *Knickerbocker* 3 (April 1834), 225-235, quotation on 227.

²⁶ Metcalf, “The Interest and Importance of Scientific Geology,” quotation on 229.

²⁷ Metcalf, “The Interest and Importance of Scientific Geology,” quotation on 229.

²⁸ Metcalf, “The Interest and Importance of Scientific Geology,” quotation on 227.

Geology: Establishing the Paradigm for Biblical Reinterpretation

In the early nineteenth century, geologists in America, Britain, and Europe, most of them observant Protestants and many even ordained clergy, gave new emphasis to the empirical study of the earth's physical features.²⁹ Unlike in Germany, Anglophone harmonizers of the natural sciences and Christianity were among the period's most respected and influential geologists, and their observations of geological strata and fossil deposits naturally led them to revisit the Genesis account of creation. The American geologists most prominently working to reconcile this narrative with geological evidence were Benjamin Silliman, Edward Hitchcock, and James Dwight Dana, a trio so influential that one historian has referred to them as an "apostolic succession" of pious geology.³⁰ In addition to advocating a more scientific reinterpretation of the Bible, these harmonizers also helped to promote the use of geology within natural theology, contributing to the widespread conviction that the Book of Nature naturally and dependably confirmed claims in the Book of Scripture.

Benjamin Silliman: Devout Scientific Publisher

The association of geological study with biblical theology was epitomized in the career of Yale chemist and geologist Benjamin Silliman (1779-1864), one of America's most influential scientific publishers, teachers, and textbook authors. By the early nineteenth century, even the most religiously orthodox natural historians were beginning to exclude supernatural explanations from their scientific work, and the nation's leading scientific journals also tended to avoid

²⁹ Conrad Wright, "The Religion of Geology," *New England Quarterly* 14:2 (June 1941), 335-358, on 337.

³⁰ James R. Moore, "Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis in the Nineteenth Century," in *God and Nature*, eds. Lindberg and Numbers, 322-350, quotation on 338.

explicit reference to religion.³¹ In establishing the *American Journal of Science*, the nation's premier scientific periodical, Silliman explicitly encouraged the search for natural explanations to be viewed as a religiously meaningful activity, as he stated in its inaugural issue: "The whole circle of physical science is directly applicable to human wants, and constantly holds out a light to the practical arts; it thus polishes and benefits society, and every where demonstrates both supreme intelligence, and harmony and beneficence of design in the Creator."³² In the *Journal* and in his many geology and chemistry monographs, Silliman distinguished himself by creating literary spaces where this harmonization of science and the Bible could be developed and promoted.³³

One of the early tasks of nineteenth-century harmonizers was to reconcile the six days of the Genesis creation narrative with the natural evidence that indicated a much longer process. Having read the work of leading geologists Georges Cuvier and William Buckland, Silliman was introduced to an interpretation of the Genesis narrative in which each of the "days" represented a geological epoch of indefinite length.³⁴ In 1829 he published an American edition of the British geologist Robert Bakewell's *Introduction to Geology*, which promptly became the standard

³¹ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 14, 26-27, 29, 39-58; Peter Harrison, "Naturalism and the Success of Science," *Religious Studies* 56 (2020), 274-291; Brad S. Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History and Theory* 45:4 (December 2006), 132-149.

³² Benjamin Silliman, "Introductory Remarks," *American Journal of Science* 1 (1818), 1-8, quotation on 8.

³³ Andrew John Lewis, "The Curious and the Learned: Natural History in the Early American Republic," (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 2001), 175; Robert L. Herbert, "The Complete Correspondence of Edward Hitchcock and Benjamin Silliman, 1817-1863" (unpublished manuscript, www.amherst.edu/library/archives/holdings/hitchcock), 51.

³⁴ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 23-28, 101-103.

geological textbook in the United States. In the fourth edition of this text, published in 1833, Silliman added a lengthy supplement reinterpreting the biblical creation to reflect the tremendous spans of time indicated by the physical evidence: “The result of all our enquiries is this. We find that the geological formations are in accordance with the Mosaic account of the creation; but more time is required for the necessary events of the creation than is consistent with the common understanding of the days.”³⁵ Beneath the relatively recent strata associated with the Genesis deluge were extensive layers indicating the immensity of time passed before the life of Noah. Concluding that the biblical chronology was only intended to tell the story of God’s plan for humanity, rather than the full history of the universe, Silliman felt free to understand each “day” as an extended span of time.³⁶

Because the American edition of Bakewell served as the most widely-used geology textbook in American colleges, the “day-age” accommodation of the Scripture narrative to the physical evidence was communicated widely.³⁷ As the editor of the *American Journal of Science*, Silliman also used his position to disseminate this particular reconciliation of Genesis and geology. By the early 1840s geologists had overwhelmingly relinquished the model of a 6000-year-old earth that had been significantly shaped by a global flood. A colleague in

³⁵ Benjamin Silliman, *An Introduction to Geology by Robert Bakewell* (New Haven, CT: Hezekiah Howe & Co., 1833), quotation on 461.

³⁶ Wright, “Religion of Geology,” 337-341; Charles Coulston Gillispie, ed., *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1981), vol. 12, 432-434; Silliman, “Introductory Remarks,” 7.

³⁷ Martin J. S. Rudwick, “The Shape and Meaning of Earth History,” in *God and Nature*, eds. Lindberg and Numbers, 308-317; Ronald L. Numbers, “Aggressors, Victims, and Peacemakers: Historical Actors in the Drama of Science and Religion,” in *The Religion and Science Debate: Why Does It Continue?* ed. Harold W. Attridge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 21.

Silliman's *Journal* noted with satisfaction the broad popular appeal of this harmonization of science and Scripture, as "lectures upon geology are demanded and given in all our larger towns; and the wonders of this science form the theme of discussion in the drawing-rooms of taste and fashion," the Yale geologist was joined by "multitudes" in his geological reinterpretation of Genesis.³⁸

Edward Hitchcock: Genesis Reinterpreted through the Eyes of Science

An additional difficulty with the Genesis account was that, not only did geological evidence indicate that the earth was much older than the conventional interpretation, but the strata and fossil records also implied a long passage of time between the formation of the planet and the appearance of life.³⁹ The first published attempt in the United States to reinterpret the biblical narrative to accommodate these geological facts was by Silliman's protégé, the pastor-naturalist Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864). In his 1835 *Biblical Repository* article "The Connection Between Geology and The Mosaic History of Creation," Hitchcock asked of the Genesis 1 account, "Can we believe that criticism has reached its *ne plus ultra* in eking out the meaning?

³⁸ Rebecca Bedell, "Thomas Cole and the Fashionable Science," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 59:2/3 (1996), 348-378 (popular geology in Silliman's *Journal*); Edward Hitchcock, "First Anniversary Address before the Association of American Geologists," *American Journal of Science and Arts* 41 (October 1841), 232-275, quotation on 271 (lectures upon geology); Ronald L. Numbers, "Natural Science and Revealed Religion," 20-22 (lectures upon geology).

³⁹ Stanley M. Guralnick, "Geology and Religion before Darwin: The Case of Edward Hitchcock, Theologian and Geologist (1793-1864)," *Isis* 63:4 (December 1972), 529-543; Philip J. Lawrence, "Edward Hitchcock: The Christian Geologist," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 116:1 (February 15, 1972), 21-34; Rodney Lee Stiling, "The Diminishing Deluge: Noah's Flood in Nineteenth-Century American Thought," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991), 206-217.

May not geology itself put into the interpreter's hands the clue that will disentangle all difficulties?"⁴⁰

Hitchcock read that, four decades earlier, the Scottish Evangelical minister Thomas Chalmers had advocated one possible solution, which also offered to resolve an internal inconsistency in the Genesis narrative itself. Biblical scholars had puzzled over the apparent discrepancy between Genesis 1:1:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
and Genesis 1:2:

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.
And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.⁴¹

These passages describe the act of creation in two slightly different ways, with the difference representing a potentially serious doctrinal question. In the former verse, the use of the word בָּרָא (bara) for "create" implies the orthodox doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, since this verb is used typically to describe God's acts of creation, rather than the assembly of something from existing matter. The latter verse, however, introduces a lengthy description of creation from an already existing, formless world. If Protestants claimed that the Bible accurately characterized the natural world as well as the spiritual, Hitchcock agreed that their case would be strengthened by resolving apparent inconsistencies such as this.⁴²

⁴⁰ Edward Hitchcock, "The Connection between Geology and Natural Religion" and "The Connection between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation," *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 5:17 (January 1835), 113-138, and 6:20 (October 1835), 261-332, quotation on 329.

⁴¹ King James Version.

⁴² Edward Hitchcock, *Elementary Geology* (Amherst, J. S. & C. Adams, 1840), 265-273; Thomas Chalmers, "Remarks on Cuvier's Theory of the Earth," *The Select Works of Thomas Chalmers* (New York: Robert Carter, 1848), I:180-193; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3,"

Chalmers had promoted in 1814 a reconciliation of these slightly different accounts in which a considerable span of time had elapsed between the initial creation of the earth and the first “day,” at which point Eden and its inhabitants were also created from the existing matter.⁴³ This explanation eventually found favor with many nineteenth-century harmonizers, and Hitchcock led the way forty years later in disseminating it through Silliman’s *Journal* and in his own lectures and sermons. He reasoned that, with this accommodation, Scripture and geological evidence basically agreed on the fundamental steps of creation, that: rather than the cosmos being eternal, it was created in a definite beginning; the entire surface of the earth was once submerged under water; its creation was an extended process, culminating with humanity; and, in the relatively recent past, its entire surface was swept by a catastrophic flood. Based on this concurrence, Hitchcock noted, “Many distinguished geologists maintain, that the Mosaic account is strongly confirmed by geology.”⁴⁴

Hitchcock’s earlier writings indicated that, beginning in approximately 1823, he had also considered for a time Silliman’s approach of interpreting the “days” of Genesis as geological eras. He promoted both of these interpretations among his ministerial colleagues and through his

Bibliotheca Sacra 132 (1975), 327-342, on 335-338; John Pye Smith, *The Relation between the Holy Scriptures and Some Parts of Geological Science* (Philadelphia: Robert E. Peterson, 1850), 184-196; Ronald L. Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1977), 89-90; Stiling, “Diminishing Deluge,” 208-234.

⁴³ Lawrence, “Edward Hitchcock,” on 23; Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 89-91; Brendan Pietsch, “Dispensational Modernism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2011), 129-134; David N. Livingstone, “The Preadamite Theory and the Marriage of Science and Religion,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 82:3 (1992), ix-x, 1-78; Stiling, “Diminishing Deluge,” 206-217.

⁴⁴ Edward Hitchcock, “The Connection between Geology and the Mosaic History of the Creation,” *Biblical Repository and Quarterly Observer* 5:18 (April 1835), 439-451, quotation on 450.

geological writings, explaining that geology's apparent tensions with Genesis were merely a conflict with the *conventional* understanding of Scripture, which could be reconciled by either of these accommodations. However, by the last decade of his life, he dismissed the "day-age" interpretation as scientifically unsound. Hitchcock was generally reluctant to embrace any explanation that could not be corroborated with the direct observation of evidence, and the order of creation described in Genesis did not correspond with what was seen in the fossil record, except as a broadly symbolic sequence. In his work as a geologist, Hitchcock's primary concern was not with history after humanity's appearance, but before; he maintained his focus on the so-called "gap" interpretation, which theorized the existence of an unspecified span of time between the two creation narratives contained in Genesis. This reading of the Bible was scientifically expedient because it also allowed the explanation of the apparent extinctions and creations of species happening long before the arrival of humans.⁴⁵

As a Protestant minister, Hitchcock also found the gap interpretation religiously expedient; it preserved a place for divine intervention in an increasingly naturalistic narrative, for he was convinced that the creation of new species was the one development remaining completely inexplicable in natural terms.⁴⁶ He also noted that the long passage of time and accumulation of strata before humanity's appearance provided an opportunity to see divine benevolence in the abundant resources produced beneath our feet:

⁴⁵ Edward Hitchcock, *Utility of Natural History* (Pittsfield, MA: Phineas Allen, 1823), 25-26; Edward Hitchcock, *The Religion of Geology and Its Connected Sciences* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson, and Company, 1859), second edition, 536-552; Herbert, "Complete Correspondence," 7-8; Wright, "Religion of Geology," 335-358, on 346-347.

⁴⁶ Herbert, "Complete Correspondence," 28; David N. Livingstone, *Darwin's Forgotten Defenders* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 1997), 16-20.

The vegetables that existed in those early periods, have been converted, in the course of time, into the various species of coal now dug from the bowels of the earth; while the remains of the animals of those times have become changed into limestone. And even those violent volcanic agencies, by which the successive races of plants and animals have been suddenly destroyed, have probably introduced into the upper part of the earth's crust, various metallic veins, very important to human happiness.⁴⁷

James Dwight Dana: A Dwindling Tradition of Harmonization

Another significant and influential harmonizer of geology and Genesis to develop under Silliman's care, soon becoming his son-in-law, successor at Yale, and co-editor of the *American Journal of Science*, was James Dwight Dana (1813-1895). Having studied at Yale under Silliman, Dana also embraced the day-age interpretation of Genesis, although he showed less interest in promoting a natural theology interpretation in his scientific work. After serving as a geologist on the *USS Peacock* for the United States Exploring Expedition in the Pacific from 1837 to 1841, Dana returned to America to complete his extensive reports. He married Silliman's daughter Henrietta Frances Silliman in 1844, and became co-editor of the *American Journal of Science* in 1846. In 1850 Dana was named Silliman's successor at Yale, and he served as the Silliman Professor of Natural History and Geology for the rest of his career.⁴⁸

Dana first entered the Genesis controversy after Tayler Lewis (1802-1877), Professor of Greek at the non-denominational Union College, published a book in 1855 that attempted to explain Genesis I purely through philological research—the linguistic reconstruction of the

⁴⁷ Edward Hitchcock, *Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany, and Zoology of Massachusetts* (Amherst: Press of J. S. and C. Adams, 1833), quotation on 247-248.

⁴⁸ Moore, "Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis," 338-340; Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 94-100; Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 103-106; Wright, "Religion of Geology," 353; Herbert, "Complete Correspondence," 45, 198.

original texts—with no reference to geological evidence. Hearing that, like himself and Silliman, Lewis embraced the day-age interpretation, Dana expected to receive the work favorably. Instead, he found himself bristling at the philologist's negative attitude toward the involvement of the natural sciences, as well as his limited comprehension of the value of geology in clarifying Genesis. Consistent with his most orthodox theologian colleagues, Lewis had insisted that the Bible was to be interpreted rather than reconciled. The Union professor restricted his claims to the domain of philology as idiographic (interpreted) rather than nomothetic (lawful) knowledge, but Dana believed that Lewis misunderstood the function and value of geology. Dana explained in his four-part review, "Accepting the account in Genesis as true, the seeming discrepancy between it and geology rests mainly here: geology holds, and has held from the first, that the progress of creation was mainly through secondary causes."⁴⁹ Although the sciences could not illuminate the ultimate causes of phenomena, the knowledge they provided about immediate causes was still true and useful. The disagreement between these two scholars was nothing so sweeping as a battle between science and religion, but rather the more specific question of where the limits to scientific methods should be located. Dana's writings offered a vindication of the natural sciences and their underappreciated conclusions.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ James Dwight Dana, "Science and the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 13:49 (January 1856), 80-129, quotation on 108.

⁵⁰ Tayler Lewis, *The Six Days of Creation or, The Scriptural Cosmology, with the Ancient Idea of a Plurality of Time-Worlds, in Distinction from Worlds in Space* (Schenectady: G. Y. van DeBogert, 1855); 13:51 (July 1856), 631-656; 14:54 (April 1857), 388-413; and 14:55 (July 1857), 461-524; Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 95-100; Wright, "Religion of Geology," 354; Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 216.

The Dana-Lewis debate was one of the most celebrated conflicts over the authority of science to interpret the Bible, and it is notable that the opposition to geology's contribution to Genesis 1 came from outside the natural sciences, rather than from within.⁵¹ The arguments between the two scholars also illustrate how far the debates had shifted since the beginning of the nineteenth century. Silliman, Hitchcock, and Dana had broadly disseminated the idea that the "plain sense" of the biblical narrative could readily be reinterpreted to accommodate geological evidence; even a clergyman like Hitchcock could defer to the physical evidence and comfortably continue to uphold a Protestant worldview. With their authority to clarify the Bible's meaning now well established among their scientific peers, serious students of nature could finally carry out their work "as if the Scriptures were not in existence," as William Buckland had once urged.⁵² Although this general "handmaiden" compromise allowing geology to supersede Genesis was solidifying in popularity among the naturalist geologists, by about 1860 it also aroused an angry response among a movement of religiously conservative amateur students of nature. The publications of these self-styled "scriptural geologists" were enjoying significant popularity among non-scholarly readers and contributed to the popular interest in geology as a pious science, although they found themselves increasingly estranged from academic circles. Dana represented the rapidly shrinking cohort of the more expert harmonizers: his most

⁵¹ Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 11.

⁵² Anonymous, review of *Reliquiae Diluvianae; or, Observations on the Organic Remains Contained in Caves, Fissures, and Diluvial Gravel, and on other Geological Phenomena, Attesting the Action of an Universal Deluge*, by William Buckland, in *The Edinburgh Review or Critical Journal* 39 (1823-1824), 196-234, quotation on 198.

significant contemporaries had died, and the position of harmonization was left to an increasingly amateur network of preachers and popular writers.⁵³

Cosmology: Science and the Bible Explore the Formation of the Heavens

A similar progression of ideas and activity took place in the study of the heavens. Astronomy inspired, more than any other scientific discipline, a sense of awe and transcendence; as Benjamin Silliman reminded his students, it was, “not without reason, regarded, by mankind, as the sublimest of the sciences.”⁵⁴ However, the naturalistic forms of astronomical knowledge also possessed the power to undermine one’s existing worldview, including religious faith. English biologist Thomas Henry Huxley warned, “Astronomy,—which of all sciences has filled men’s minds with general ideas of a character most foreign to their daily experience, has more than any other rendered it impossible for them to accept the beliefs of their fathers.”⁵⁵ Unsurprisingly, this sublimity and tension found expression in both scientific biblical interpretation and in controversy.⁵⁶

⁵³ Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Worlds before Adam: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 294-303, 423-425; Milton Millhauser, “The Scriptural Geologists: An Episode in the History of Opinion,” *Osiris* 11 (1954), 65-86; G. Blair Nelson, “Ethnology and the ‘Two Books’: Some Nineteenth-Century Americans on Preadamist Polygenism,” *Nature and Scripture in the Abrahamic Religions, 1700-Present*, eds. Jitse M. van der Meer and Scott Mandelbrote (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2008), 145-179, on 145; Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1959), 212-214; Moore, “Geologists and Interpreters of Genesis,” 340-341; Richard Perry Tison II, “Lords of Creation: American Scriptural Geology and the Lord Brothers’ Assault on ‘Intellectual Atheism’,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2008), *passim*.

⁵⁴ Benjamin Silliman, *An Introductory Lecture, Delivered in the Laboratory of Yale College, October, 1828* (New Haven: Hezekiah Howe, 1828), quotation on 28.

⁵⁵ Thomas Henry Huxley, “On the Advisableness of Improving Natural Knowledge,” *The Fortnightly Review* 3 (Jan-Mar 1866), 626-637, quotation on 634.

⁵⁶ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 24-26.

The application of astronomical knowledge to biblical criticism began with the trend toward naturalistic explanations of the solar system's origins.⁵⁷ In contrast with the integration of science and Protestant theology evident in the work of Isaac Newton, for example, the cosmogony of the French natural historian Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707-1788) invoked only natural causes, contributing to the growing precedent of methodological naturalism. Reasoning that the sun's matter could be knocked loose by a passing comet, Buffon speculated that the planets could have formed from the condensation of such dislodged material: "May it not be imagined, with some degree of probability, that a comet falling into the body of the sun, will displace and separate some parts from the surface, and communicate to them a motion of impulsion, insomuch that the planets may formerly have belonged to the body of the sun, and been detached therefrom by an impulsive force, and which they still preserve."⁵⁸ Even more influential was a theory first explored rigorously by the French mathematician Pierre-Simon Laplace (1749-1827); this "nebular hypothesis" explained how the sun's atmosphere of incandescent gas could have cooled and contracted into rings of matter, then into orbiting planets.

Let us now consider the zones of vapours, which have been successively abandoned. These zones ought to form by their condensation, and the mutual attraction of their particles, several concentric rings of vapours circulating about the Sun. If all the particles of a ring of vapours continued to condense without separating, they would at length constitute a solid or a liquid ring. Almost always each ring of vapours ought to be divided into several masses, which should continue to revolve at the same distance about the Sun. But if one of them was sufficiently powerful, to united successively by its attraction, all

⁵⁷ Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 4-5, 6-13, 124-132.

⁵⁸ Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, *Natural History: Containing a Theory of the Earth, a General History of Man, of the Brute Creation, and of Vegetables, Minerals, &c. &c.*, trans. J. S. Barr (London: printed for the proprietor, and sold by H. D. Symonds, 1797), quotation on I:75-76.

the others about its centre, the ring of vapours would be changed into one spheroidal mass, circulating about the Sun.⁵⁹

This naturalistic account was readily embraced as confirmation of the Mosaic narrative, such that one Princeton professor recalled that Laplace's theory "had scarcely been formed before it was seized as the Biblical cosmogony or doctrine of creation."⁶⁰

The first known explicit attempt to reconcile the solar system's nebular formation with the Mosaic account of creation was in 1840 by the Swiss-American physical geographer Arnold Guyot (1807-1884).⁶¹ Struck by the similarity between this naturalistic hypothesis and the Genesis narrative, Guyot extended the day-age interpretation in Benjamin Silliman's geology to include the astronomical steps in the creation. He interpreted the formless "waters" described in the Pentateuch as the gaseous atmosphere of the nebulae. The chemical reactions within this concentrated gas generated the light of the first "day," before even the sun had appeared. The dividing of the waters on the next "day" symbolized the coagulation of the nebulae into multiple planetary systems. The earth condensed on the third "day" to form a solid globe, with the rest of the nebulous vapors dispersing. On the fourth "day," the light of the sun was able to shine upon the earth, where the lands were populated with living creatures on the subsequent days.⁶²

⁵⁹ Pierre-Simon Laplace, *The System of the World*, trans. J. Pond (London: Richard Phillips, 1809), 2 vols., cited in Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, quotation on 131-132.

⁶⁰ Charles Woodruff Shields, *The Final Philosophy, or, System of Perfectible Knowledge Issuing from the Harmony of Science and Religion* (2nd ed.; New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1877), quotation on 326.

⁶¹ Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 91-100.

⁶² Arnold Guyot, *Creation, or The Biblical Cosmogony in the Light of Modern Science* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884); James D. Dana, *Memoir of Arnold Guyot* (Washington, DC: Judd & Detweiler, 1886).

Guyot's appropriation of the day-age interpretation for the nebular hypothesis first went into print in 1852, when the New York *Evening Post* summarized in four installments his lectures at the Spingler Institute for the education of young ladies.⁶³ He began his series by explaining that, although the Bible was not scientific in the modern understanding of the word, the faithful believer nevertheless bore the responsibility to understand its intended message in light of the emerging secrets of nature, and embrace "the true interpretation of its words."⁶⁴ The appeal of the Protestant Congruence was clear for the *Evening Post*'s readers, and the geographer's carefully evidenced lectures were well received, even by orthodox Protestant scholars such as Princeton theologian Charles Hodge. While Guyot's reputation grew and resulted in frequent invitations to lecture, he was unable to motivate himself to produce a book about his biblical interpretation until the last year of his life. Other colleagues, however, gladly popularized his work on his behalf. In 1855, the Reverend John O. Means summarized the Spingler lectures in Andover Seminary's theological journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*. In the year that followed, James Dwight Dana used his acrimonious debate with Tayler Lewis to review and celebrate Guyot's work as exemplary of both the legitimation of natural philosophy and the proper tone of engagement with one's opponents: "The best views we have met with on the harmony between Science and the Bible, are those of Prof. Arnold Guyot, a philosopher of

⁶³ Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 93-101; Ronald L. Numbers, "Science without God: Natural Laws and Christian Beliefs," *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 265-285, on 277; John O. Means, "The Narrative of the Creation in Genesis," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 12 (1855), 83-130, 323-338.

⁶⁴ Arnold Guyot, "The Mosaic Cosmogony and Modern Science Reconciled," New York *Evening Post* (March 6, March 12, March 15, and March 23, 1852, no pagination), quotation on March 23, 1852.

enlarged comprehension of nature and a truly christian spirit.”⁶⁵ Dana’s eminent textbook *Manual of Geology* (1863) also included Guyot’s reconciliation of natural science and the Genesis account, instilling this interpretation in the next generations of naturalists. Indeed, few Americans protested against this particular form of harmonization, on behalf of either biblical or scientific purity. It was uncommon to see the claim that Scripture should be exempt from the insights of astronomical knowledge, partly because of the popularity of the Protestant Congruence; in Dana’s words, the study of nature was viewed as pious a practice as the study of the Bible:

The record in the Bible is profoundly philosophical in the scheme of creation which it presents. It is both true and divine. There can be no real conflict between the two Books of the GREAT AUTHOR. Both are revelations made by Him to man,— the *earlier* telling of God-made harmonies coming up from the deep past, and rising to their height when man appeared, the *later* teaching man’s relations to his Maker, and speaking of loftier harmonies in the eternal future.⁶⁶

Biological Sciences: Explanations for the Spark of Life

The scientific interpretation of the Bible in the nineteenth century was provoked, not only by the discovery of inorganic evidences in geology and astronomy, but also by the study of organic life. In the Genesis account, the appearance of life on earth was accomplished by divine fiat, beginning with the plants:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:11-12)⁶⁷

⁶⁵ James Dwight Dana, *Science and the Bible: A Review of “The Six Days of Creation” of Prof. Tayler Lewis* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1856), quotation on 110.

⁶⁶ James Dwight Dana, *Manual of Geology* (Philadelphia: Theodore Bliss & Co., 1863), 741-746, quotation on 746.

⁶⁷ King James Version.

Genesis I continues with the origin of the creatures in the water and air, then those on the land, and finally the first man—each creation by fiat, after which God acknowledges the natural order and declares it good. Later, after this created life had multiplied and covered the face of the earth, God realized the predilection of humanity for evil and destroyed all life through a great flood, sparing only Noah and his family, and specimens of every living thing, which survived on the ark Noah had built. After one hundred and fifty days the waters receded, and the ark came to rest in the mountains of Ararat, where its occupants disembarked and spread out to repopulate the earth.⁶⁸

However, the presence of fossils in the earth's strata indicated to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century natural historians that this biblical narrative would require some reinterpretation to accommodate the physical evidence. Their documentation of the so-called *geological column*, a rough timeline of the successive depositions making up the planet's surface, demanded a chronology much longer than six days and implied the appearance of the various species in a particular order. The Age of Exploration and the growing European awareness of an enormous number of previously unknown plants and animals also made the plain sense of the Genesis account appear increasingly far-fetched. While seventeenth-century naturalist John Ray had catalogued fifteen hundred species of animals, less than a century later Carl Linnaeus could list fifty-six hundred species of quadrupeds alone, and this proliferation of

⁶⁸ Jonathan R. Topham, "Biology in the service of natural theology: Paley, Darwin, and the *Bridgewater Treatises*," *Biology and Ideology: From Descartes to Dawkins*, eds. Denis R. Alexander and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 88-113; Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 52-83.

natural knowledge only became more difficult to reconcile with the story of Noah's ark and the repopulation of the earth from a single location.⁶⁹

No other natural historian influenced early nineteenth-century debates over the history of the earth more than the French paleontologist Georges Cuvier (1769-1832). Some of Cuvier's contemporaries, such as Swiss geologist Jean-André De Luc (1727-1817), believed that the proliferation of scientific evidence could be shown to authenticate the scriptural Flood. Cuvier's approach, however, was to disregard the claims of the Genesis account almost entirely. His studies of geological strata and fossil deposits led him to conclude that the earth's surface had experienced a number of cataclysms, extinguishing entire species now preserved only as fossils. Rather than describing these upheavals with the language of "catastrophe," which was already being used in defenses the biblical narrative, he preferred to call them "revolutions," fully intending the radical and violent overtones that word would have had in eighteenth-century France. He explained at the turn of the nineteenth century that no reliable facts could be shown to controvert the paleontological evidence of a world before the present one, destroyed by such a revolution.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Martin J. S. Rudwick, *The Meaning of Fossils: Episodes in the History of Paleontology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 36-38; Ronald L. Numbers, "Scientific Creationism and Intelligent Design," in Harrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, 127-147, on 128; Michael Roberts, *Evangelicals and Science* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2008), 89ff.; Peter M. Hess, "Natural History," in Ferngren, ed., *History of Science and Religion*, 499-506, on 504; Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 4-5.

⁷⁰ Rudwick, *Meaning of Fossils*, 109-111; Topham, "Biology in the Service of Natural Theology," 102; Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 35; Georges Cuvier, "Mémoire sur les espèces d'Éléphants tant vivantes que fossils..." *Magasin encyclopédique* 2:3 (1796), 440-445, on 444.

Although Cuvier's original work promoted a methodologically naturalist account of the earth's history, the disseminators of his ideas continued to associate his model of terrestrial revolutions with the biblical Flood.⁷¹ For example, when Scottish naturalist Robert Jameson (1774-1854) published in 1813 an English translation of *Théorie de la terre* (Theory of the Earth), he appended his own commentary explaining how the most recent revolution in Cuvier's chronology could be understood as the Noachian Deluge, concluding triumphantly that the scriptural narrative was therefore vindicated scientifically:

Although the Mosaic account of the creation of the world is an inspired writing, and consequently rests on evidence totally independent of human observation and experience, still it is interesting, and in many respects important, to know that it coincides with the various phenomena observable in the mineral kingdom. Subjects so important cannot fail to excite very general notice, to fix the attention of the naturalist on a new series of facts, to admonish the skeptic, and afford the highest pleasure to those who delight in illustrating the truth of the Sacred Writings, by an appeal to the facts and reasonings of natural history.⁷²

Another especially influential British geologist, William Buckland (1784-1856), also used Jameson's supplemented edition of Cuvier in 1822, when he famously interpreted the skeletal remains found in a prehistoric Yorkshire hyena den. Although he was ultimately not able to sustain his original argument that these artifacts had been buried there by the biblical Flood, Buckland's careful observations and use of Cuvier's principles of comparative anatomy led him to elaborate on a tenet central to natural theology, that each fossilized species had been well suited to its function in its particular environment. Buckland studied and reconstructed fossil evidence with the explicit goal of demonstrating the adaptation of each part to the organism's

⁷¹ Rudwick, *Meaning of Fossils*, 132; Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 36.

⁷² Robert Jameson, Preface and Comments to George Cuvier, *Essay on the Theory of the Earth, Translated from the French of M. Cuvier*, tr. Robert Kerr (Edinburgh: Printed for William Blackwood, et al., 1815), quotation on v, viii-ix.

whole body, and the adaptation of the organism to its circumstances. The geological and paleontological record provided the natural explanation that the revolutions punctuating the earth's history had extinguished many species.⁷³ However, in his model, the repopulation of the earth at the beginning of each new epoch could not be explained naturally but required God's supernatural intervention into the planet's history: "In the course of our enquiry, we have found abundant proofs, both of the Beginning and the End of several successive systems of animal and vegetable life; each compelling us to refer its origin to the direct agency of Creative Interference."⁷⁴

Despite his continued insistence on divine intervention in the epochal creation of new species, the arc of Buckland's career also exemplified the growing reluctance of geologists to associate geological deluges and other natural cataclysms with the biblical Flood. He had claimed in his earlier works such as *Reliquiae Diluvianae* (1823) that fossil evidence of the relatively recent extinction of land mammals, preserved under sediment deposits, "affording the strongest evidence of an universal deluge, leads us to hope, that it will no longer be asserted, as it has been by high authorities, that geology supplies no proofs of an event in the reality of which the truth of the Mosaic records is so materially involved."⁷⁵ However, he himself ended up

⁷³ Rudwick, *Meaning of Fossils*, 136; Topham, "Biology in the Service of Natural Theology," 88-113, on 97; Mott T. Greene, "Genesis and Geology Revisited: The Order of Nature and the Nature of Order in Nineteenth-Century Britain," eds. Lindberg and Numbers, *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 139-159.

⁷⁴ William Buckland, *Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (London: William Pickering, 1836), quotation on I:586.

⁷⁵ William Buckland, *Reliquiae Diluvianae; or, Observations on the Organic Remains Contained in Caves, Fissures, and Diluvial Gravel, and on Other Geological Phenomena, Attesting the Action of an Universal Deluge* (London: John Murray, 1823), quotation on iii.

making precisely that assertion in his contribution to the Bridgewater Treatises, *Geology and Mineralogy Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (1836). It had been more difficult than he had anticipated to establish proof that a “geological deluge” had not only occurred recently enough to be interpreted as the biblical Flood, but also that it had swept the entire earth’s surface and been great enough to deposit evidence on even the highest mountains. He had begun to acknowledge by this time that the biblical account of the Noachian Deluge could not, in fact, be confirmed using scientific evidence, a conclusion by then already generally shared among his fellow geologists. Within a few more years, evidence for glacial activity had dissuaded Buckland and his scientific contemporaries entirely from any claims for a universal flood.⁷⁶

Natural historians in the United States had shown little sustained interest in earth science before the nineteenth century. Although several impressive fossil discoveries were made during the mid- and late eighteenth century, including those of large vertebrates, there was no organized discipline to classify these isolated evidences. The fields of geology and paleontology developed rapidly in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when an American edition of Cuvier was published, and Benjamin Silliman and Edward Hitchcock developed the primary network through which scientific discoveries on both sides of the Atlantic were interpreted and disseminated.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Rudwick, *Worlds before Adam*, 80-82, 193, 427, 517-533; M. J. S. Rudwick, “Lyell and the Principles of Geology,” *Geological Society, London, Special Publications* 143 (January 1, 1998), 3-15, on 5.

⁷⁷ Wright, “Religion of Geology,” 337; Robert M. Hazen, “The Founding of Geology in America: 1771 to 1818,” *Geological Society of America Bulletin* 85 (December 1974), 1827-1834, on 1829.

Robert Jameson's supplemented edition of Cuvier was enthusiastically embraced in the Anglophone world, especially for its purported scientific confirmation of scriptural revelation. The American physician and naturalist Samuel Mitchill (1764-1831) arranged for it to be reprinted in the United States, including Jameson's explanation in terms of the biblical flood. Mitchill also appended several of Cuvier's essays, including an 80-page catalogue of the known European fossil vertebrates, organized by class, order, family, genus, and species.⁷⁸ Thus American natural historians inherited a harmonizing version of Cuvier's system for the comparative study of fossil bones to aid them in "deciphering and restoring these remains, reproducing, in all their original proportions and characters the animals to which the fragments formerly belonged, and then of comparing them with those of animals which still live."⁷⁹

Although British natural historians in the eighteenth century had promoted "theories of the earth" associating geological strata and fossil deposits with the Genesis Flood, by the early nineteenth century there was no significant scholar of earth science in the United States willing to advocate this connection. American geologists who still affirmed the biblical Deluge lacked a scientific model for it until the 1820s when, more than any other scientific figure, Edward Hitchcock led the way in the embrace and later rejection of this explanation. Because the fossiliferous layers of earth were central to the recognition of the planet's long history and the consequent day-age and gap interpretations of the Bible account, Hitchcock added the study of paleontology to his education, and soon became a leader in that nascent discipline as well. The

⁷⁸ Rudwick, *Meaning of Fossils*, 133-135; Hazen, "Founding of Geology," 1830; Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 102-104.

⁷⁹ Georges Cuvier, *Essay on the Theory of the Earth*, tr. Robert Kerr (New York: Kirk & Mercein, 1818), quotation on 25-26.

identification of marine fossil layers at high elevations led him to reason at the beginning of his career that the earth's surface had experienced several massive floods, and the continuing buildup of sand dunes and peat deposits moved him to conclude that the latest revolution had occurred at a time "not very remote," providing "a direct proof that the Mosaic account is true."⁸⁰ Although Hitchcock continued to profess the reality of the Genesis Flood until his death in 1864, he eventually relinquished all claims for scientific evidence confirming the biblical account. In this shift toward methodological naturalism he reflected the trend among his colleagues, virtually all of whom had stopped trying to correlate sediment deposits and Scripture by 1850. Whatever they personally believed religiously about the truth of the Mosaic Flood narrative, paleontologists and geologists no longer invoked physical evidence to validate it.⁸¹

Humanity's Origins: Beyond the Limits of Accommodation

While the strategy of methodological naturalism generally defused controversy over the relationship between scientific knowledge and the Genesis account of creation, the specific question of human origins and types was not as simple to resolve and served as a barrier in the development of scientific Scripture interpretation. The Princeton theologian Charles Hodge, who had easily reconciled geology and astronomy with his conservative Calvinist faith, noted that the same could not be done for the study of humanity, because "the very object of the Bible was to

⁸⁰ Edward Hitchcock, "Proofs of the Mosaic Account of the Deluge" (unpublished, c. 1820), cited in Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," quotations on 59-61.

⁸¹ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 24, 30; Monte Harrell Hampton, "Rumors of War," *The Warfare between Science and Religion*, eds. Jeff Hardin, Ronald L. Numbers, Ronald A. Binzley (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 46-64, on 51-53, 57; Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 52-53, 56-61.

clear up the history of the fall of man, to explain the condition in which he is found, and to reveal a plan for his recovery.”⁸² The conventional claims about humanity’s origins and development were dominated by the Genesis narratives that all humans descended from Adam and Eve, were culled by the Noachian Flood, and the survivors scattered across the world after the Tower of Babel. The passage Acts 17:26 affirmed that God “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”⁸³ The difficulty of reconciling the scientific study of humanity with these passages was exacerbated by the mid-nineteenth-century American social controversies over racial science and slavery. This complexity provides an especially rich range of positions in which to view the support and criticism of scientific interpretations of biblical claims.⁸⁴

Like the Comte de Buffon before him, the Göttingen physician and ethnologist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) attempted to establish a scientific foundation for the biblical claim that the varieties of humanity originated in a single act of creation, or *monogenism*. Asking in his work *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (On the Natural Varieties of Humanity), “Are men, and have the men of all times and of every race been of one and the same, or clearly or more than one species?”⁸⁵ Blumenbach sought the answer by applying the principles of critical

⁸² [Charles Hodge], review of *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race, Examined on the Principles of Science*, by John Bachman, in *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 22 (1850), 313-321, quotation on 315.

⁸³ King James Version.

⁸⁴ Livingstone, “The Preadamite Theory,” ix-x; Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 106-108.

⁸⁵ Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa* (3rd edition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht, 1795), in *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, ed. Thomas Bendyshe (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1865), 145-275, quotation on 97-98.

zoology to the natural history of humanity. Measuring sixty human skulls of different races, Blumenbach noted that the differences in cranial capacity within a race were at least as great as between races, and he confidently concluded that, as the Scripture passages implied, the many varieties of humanity were all of the same species: “No doubt can any longer remain but that we are with great probability right in referring all and singular as many varieties of man as are at present known to one and the same species.”⁸⁶ The ethnologist also provided the extra-biblical explanation that all humans were descended from the same “primeval” Caucasian stock, and that the each race had “degenerated” to a different extent physically and mentally as a product of exposure to its environment.⁸⁷

The competing theory, that each race of humanity was created separately, had been suggested repeatedly since at least the seventeenth century. The first known figure in America to make a strong argument on the basis of natural causes for this *polygenism* or *Pre-adamism* was the Philadelphia anatomist Samuel George Morton (1799-1851).⁸⁸ In his *Crania Americana* (1839) and *Crania Aegyptiaca* (1844), Morton claimed *contra* Blumenbach that human skull capacity varied significantly, and that skull sizes within a given racial group appeared not to have changed appreciably over time: “The physical or organic characters which distinguish the several

⁸⁶ Blumenbach, *De Generis Humani Varietate Nativa*, quotation on 275-276.

⁸⁷ Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 222-223.

⁸⁸ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 106-108; G. Blair Nelson, “‘Men before Adam!’: American Debates over the Unity and Antiquity of Humanity,” in Lindberg and Numbers, eds., *When Science and Christianity Meet*, 161-181, on 166-177; Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (New York: Columbia University, 1968), 90; Bruce Dain, *A Hideous Monster of the Mind: American Race Theory in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 197-206, 211-218.

racess of men are as old as the oldest records of our species.”⁸⁹ Over the course of the next decade, influenced by the evidence of ancient Egyptian skeletons, Morton came to conclude that humanity had been created in separate races, and that these permanent differences might be useful in arguing racial disparities in intelligence, educability, and social role. For example, he made much of the claim, “Negroes were numerous in Egypt, but their social position in ancient times was the same that it now is, that of servants and slaves.”⁹⁰

Morton’s influential and controversial work provided the foundation for the “American School” of ethnology, and the polygenist cause attracted a broad range of students of nature in the two decades before Charles Darwin refuted the fixity of species. Morton had earlier recruited George R. Gliddon (1809-1857), an American diplomat in Cairo, to collect Egyptian skulls, and the young man eagerly embraced this task, motivated partly by a desire to free ethnology from its captivity to the unscientific Adam and Eve narrative. Even more zealous and polemical was the Mobile physician Josiah Nott (1804-1873), motivated not only by anticlericalism but also by racism and pro-slavery sentiments. Nott had already been lecturing on the biological differences between the races in the early 1840s, and published *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Races*, in which he consciously styled anthropology as a natural science, independent of the Bible account. He did not reject religious belief entirely, still arguing that God had created each race in the environment best suited to their thriving, but he also asserted to

⁸⁹ Samuel George Morton, *Crania Aegyptiaca, or, Observations on Egyptian Ethnography Derived from Anatomy, History and the Monuments* (Philadelphia: John Penington, 1844), quotation on 66.

⁹⁰ Morton, *Crania Aegyptiaca*, quotation on 66.

Morton that the Bible contained “no knowledge beyond the *human* knowledge of the day.”⁹¹

From this perspective he resorted to the human argument from animal husbandry that interracial offspring were less fertile than their parents, claiming, “Many of them do not conceive at all—most are subject to abortions, and a large portion of their children die at an early age.”⁹² He recounted anecdotally “many instances” in which the vigor of racially mixed New Orleans families had “run out so completely as to leave an estate without an heir to claim it.”⁹³ From these reports he concluded that the various human races were therefore not separate varieties but different species.⁹⁴

Nott and Gliddon published the most important expression of the polygenism movement in 1854, the volume *Types of Mankind*. An 800-page tome dedicated to Morton and his ethnological legacy, *Types* brought together the opinions of the American School, much of it explicitly written to defend slavery and the systematic mistreatment of American Indians. The book’s claims, such as the antiquity of the earth, were clearly also motivated by anti-clericalism: Gliddon referred to his scholarship as “parson-skinning,”⁹⁵ and Nott’s Introduction situated the

⁹¹ Cited in William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), quotation on 68.

⁹² Josiah Nott, “The Mulatto a Hybrid—Probable Extermination of the Two Races If the Whites and Blacks are Allowed to Intermarry,” *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 29:2 (August 16, 1843), 29-32, quotation on 29.

⁹³ Nott, “The Mulatto a Hybrid,” quotation on 31.

⁹⁴ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 125, 151-157; Nelson, “Men before Adam,” 166-181; Josiah Nott, *Two Lectures on the Natural History of the Caucasian and Negro Race* (Mobile: Dade and Thompson, 1844), 16-17, 28-34.

⁹⁵ George R. Gliddon to Ephraim George Squier, November 11, 1850, cited in Stanton, *Leopard’s Spots*, quotation on 143.

debates over polygenism by declaring, “Scientific truth, exemplified in the annals of Astronomy, Geology, Chronology, Geographical distribution of animals, &c., has literally fought its way inch by inch through false theology. The last grand battle between science and dogmatism, on the primitive origin of races, has now commenced.”⁹⁶ Questionable motives aside, *Types* also proved to be popular in spite of its intimidating size and cost; the first print run of 3500 copies sold out in four months. By 1870 the book had gone through ten editions, and its arguments were widely disseminated in lectures, pamphlets, books, and newspapers. More than with previous topics involving the Bible and natural sciences, debates over the issue of ethnology and its social repercussions involved belligerent and emotional responses, and attracted even greater participation of interlocutors from outside scholarly circles.⁹⁷

One group especially inclined to advocate for the scientific interpretation of the Bible were the pastor-naturalists who embraced the Protestant Congruence, in which natural knowledge and spiritual knowledge constituted fully compatible parts of a larger wisdom.⁹⁸ One of the most prominent and effective opponents of polygenism was the Charleston Lutheran minister John Bachman (1790-1874), who also rose to prominence as a natural historian and collaborator with John James Audubon. Although he was careful in his scientific writing to

⁹⁶ Josiah Nott, “Introduction,” in *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races*, J. C. Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1854), 49-61, quotation on 60.

⁹⁷ George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 77-82; John Hartwell Moore, ed, *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism* (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA/Thomson Gale, 2008), I:94-95; Dain, *Hideous Monster*, 221, 225.

⁹⁸ Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 91-92.

emphasize natural causes, Bachman was convinced that scientific knowledge and biblical revelation were necessarily in harmony, since “the author of revelation is also the author of nature.”⁹⁹ Arguing for monogenism even before *Types of Mankind*, Bachman had published in 1850 *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race*, a methodical defense of the common origin of human varieties. He began by explaining his book as being on

purely scientific grounds irrespective of any supposed decisions of the Scriptures... The Biblical student seeks from all sources those lights that will enable him to understand the meaning of Scripture: and if Astronomy, Geology, and Physiology, in their various teachings, can aid him in rightly interpreting those passages of Scripture which to him are obscure, he will thankfully accept the aids which science affords.¹⁰⁰

This disclaimer notwithstanding, *Doctrine* ultimately established its claims from a perspective of the Bible as history. The extinction of the earth’s original inhabitants in the global Flood, Bachman reasoned, had been followed by the dispersal of humanity in Noah’s three sons and their families. “We discover in Shem the parent of the Caucasian race—the progenitor of the Israelites and our Saviour. In Japheth that of the wide spread Mongolian, many of whom to this day are dwelling in tents—as the various tribes in the East, and on our Western Continent fully testify—and Canaan, the son of Ham, is still everywhere ‘the servant of servants.’”¹⁰¹

On the premise of this biblical history, Bachman attempted to build a scientific argument for the single origin of the human races. He was one of the few nineteenth-century American

⁹⁹ John Bachman to Samuel G. Morton, October 15, 1849, cited in Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), quotation on 172.

¹⁰⁰ John Bachman, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race, Examined on the Principles of Science* (Charleston: C. Canning, 1850), quotation on 7.

¹⁰¹ Bachman, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race*, quotation on 291-292.

naturalists willing to advocate openly for the use of a single set of taxonomic principles to classify humans alongside all other organisms. Based on his own experiments with plant and animal hybrids, Bachman reasoned that, if humans were separate races, they should not be able to produce fertile offspring together or even be inclined to interbreed, claims which were observably not the case.¹⁰² Rather, all of humanity arose from the same origin, and the differences between the races were variations produced by their different environments—variations that eventually became what he called “permanent varieties.”¹⁰³ Although Bachman viewed this process of diversification as clearly producing both superior and inferior peoples, he explained that these human varieties differed as a matter of degree rather than of kind, and he accused his polygenist opponents of seeking “to degrade their servants below the level of those creatures of God to whom a revelation has been given, and for whose salvation a saviour died, as an excuse for retaining them in servitude.”¹⁰⁴

It was the preservation of scriptural authority and the natural and social order it ordained that motivated Bachman’s monogenism, rather than a belief in the equality of the races.¹⁰⁵ When Nott and Gliddon published *Types of Mankind* in 1850, Bachman made himself unpopular among his contemporaries with a four-part critique in the *Charleston Medical Review*, condemning the volume and upbraiding its contributors for their corruption of science. He had

¹⁰² Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 133; Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 197-199.

¹⁰³ Bachman, *Doctrine of Unity*, 114-119, quotation on 11, 14, 20, *passim*.

¹⁰⁴ Bachman, *Doctrine of Unity*, quotation on 8.

¹⁰⁵ Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion*, 196-200.

already incurred the animosity of the polygenists a few years earlier by criticizing their scientific credibility: “the world of Science has never admitted [Nott and his polygenist colleagues] into their ranks as naturalists. Their names are utterly unknown among them—not one of them that we are aware of, has ever described a single animal.”¹⁰⁶ Bachman knew from experience that, in criticizing Nott and Gliddon, he was provoking opponents who were willing to insult, ridicule, exaggerate, and even lie in order to reach their goal, but he remained undissuaded. Because of Gliddon’s propensity to dismiss Christian thought as “crude and juvenile hypotheses about Human Creation,” Bachman chose to begin the first part of his review by emphasizing the biblical argument for monogenism.¹⁰⁷ He continued by acknowledging the difficulty of mounting a scientific argument against a political institution, noting that Southern politicians embraced Nott’s scholarship because they believed that the strongest defense of slavery was in classifying Negroes as a separate species. The remainder of the lengthy review Bachman devoted to attacking the essay by Swiss-American natural historian Louis Agassiz, since the contribution from an established scholar of natural sciences made it more difficult to dismiss *Types* as unscientific. In particular, he criticized Agassiz’s habit of invoking explanatory concepts such as zoological zones in support of his polygenism without giving proper attention to the evidence against them.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Bachman, *Doctrine of Unity*, 8, quotation on 36.

¹⁰⁷ Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, quotation on 565.

¹⁰⁸ John Bachman, review of *Types of Mankind*, by J. C. Nott and Geo. R. Gliddon, *Charleston Medical Journal and Review* 9 (1854), 627-59, 790-806; 10 (1855), 201-22, 482-534.

Bachman found himself nearly alone among Charleston thinkers in invoking science and the Bible to criticize Nott and Gliddon's influential volume. He lamented that monogenists were sometimes "stigmatized as abolitionists and enemies of the South"¹⁰⁹ and, since sectional hostilities were significant and on the rise in the 1850s, the pastor-naturalist had to assure his contemporaries that he was still a defender of southern values. Bachman continued to justify the institution of slavery, on the basis of biblical sanction and on the argument that racial differentiation had left Negroes an irreparably inferior variety of the human species. Nevertheless, peers refused to give him a fair hearing; the Rev. James Warley Miles, an Anglican priest on the faculty of the College of Charleston, wrote, "I would not give a fig for the benevolent Dr.'s [Bachman's] recommendation of anything—except, perhaps, a partridge or a rat. I don't trust his judgment respecting the *genus homo*—whether expressed about races or individuals."¹¹⁰ Bachman died in 1874, still a devoted Southerner, but sadly wiser about the repercussions of tilting at deeply entrenched religious and social institutions with mere scientific arguments.¹¹¹

Although some scholars of nature viewed the scientific interpretation of the Bible as a natural consequence of the Protestant Congruence, others considered this activity threatening to the integrity of either the sciences or the Scripture message. Especially as methodological naturalism became more conventional in the early nineteenth century, some practitioners of the

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Stanton, *Leopard's Spots*, quotation on 72.

¹¹⁰ James Warley Miles and J. H. Easterby, "Letters of James Warley Miles to David James McCord," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 43:3 (July 1942), 185-193, quotation on 187.

¹¹¹ Frederickson, *Black Image*, 86; Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion*, 198, 264-267; Harris, *Rise of Anthropological Theory*, 91-92.

natural sciences criticized the harmonization of scientific values with the interpretation of the Bible, with the reasoning that such efforts might compromise scientific ideals and activity.¹¹² For example, geologist Charles Lyell is apocryphally said to have asserted, “The physical part of Geological inquiry ought to be conducted as if the Scriptures were not in existence.”¹¹³ Better documented is Lyell’s concern that his teacher William Buckland weakened the authority of geology by interpreting nature as a product of violent changes such as the biblical Flood. Rather, the former student insisted on interpreting the Earth’s history as the constant, incremental work of creation and destruction, fully apprehensible through physical evidence and natural processes: “*no causes whatever* have from the earliest time to which we can look back, to the present, ever acted, but those *now acting*; and that they never acted with different degrees of energy from that which they now exert.”¹¹⁴

One of the most outspoken and colorful proponents of methodological naturalism in the United States was the British-born South Carolina educator and political philosopher Thomas Cooper (1759-1839). Even before his emigration to America with Joseph Priestley in 1794, Cooper had already developed a reputation for skepticism toward intellectual convention—whether biblical, legal, or political positions—and insistence on establishing his opinion on clear

¹¹² Martin J. S. Rudwick, “The Strategy of Lyell’s *Principles of Geology*,” *Isis* 61:1 (Spring 1970), 4-33; Rudwick, *Meaning of Fossils*, 168ff.; Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Earth’s Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 163-169; Millhauser, “The Scriptural Geologists” 65-86, on 72; Greene, “Genesis and Geology Revisited,” on 150-155.

¹¹³ Martin J. S. Rudwick, “Charles Lyell Speaks in the Lecture Theatre,” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9:2 (July 1976), 147-155, quotation on 150.

¹¹⁴ Charles Lyell to Roderick Murchison, January 15, 1829, in *Life, Letters and Journals of Sir Charles Lyell, Bart.*, ed. Mrs. (Katharine M.) Lyell (London: John Murray, 1881), 234-235, quotation on 234 (emphasis Lyell’s).

evidence.¹¹⁵ In his study of nature, particularly in geology, Cooper's commitment to empiricism led the English political writer William Belsham to single him out as a "valorous champion of the material hypothesis,"¹¹⁶ and Thomas Jefferson to praise him as "one of the ablest men in America, and that in several branches of science."¹¹⁷

The issue of religious encroachment into scientific territory became a more urgent concern for Cooper in his work as a science educator.¹¹⁸ In 1811, teaching chemistry and mineralogy at Carlisle College (later renamed Dickinson College), he indicated in his Introductory Lecture that he still embraced the possibility of harmonization between the biblical worldview and the natural sciences:

whatever objections have been made to [the Mosaic statements on chemistry], they carry marks of internal evidence that entitle them to great consideration, independant of any Theological questions which may be connected with them.... The general character and extent of the Mosaic chronology, bids fairer in my opinion, harmonize with the established and probable facts of profane history, and with the progress of civilization in particular, than any other with which we are acquainted.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Thomas Cooper, *A Reply to Mr. Burke's Invective Against Mr. Cooper, and Mr. Watt* (second edition, London: J. Johnson, 1792), 68.

¹¹⁶ William Belsham, "On Materialism," *Essays Philosophical and Moral, Historical and Literary*, v. 1 (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1799), 295-345, quotation on 319.

¹¹⁷ Thomas Jefferson to Joseph C. Cabell, June 27, 1810, in *Early history of the University of Virginia*, Nathaniel Francis Cabell, ed. (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 1-2, quotation on 1.

¹¹⁸ Derek A. Davenport, "Reason and Relevance: The 1811-13 Lectures of Professor Thomas Cooper," *Journal of Chemical Education* 53:7 (1976), 419-422; Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper, 1783-1839* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 211-280.

¹¹⁹ Thomas Cooper, *The Introductory Lecture of Thomas Cooper, Esq.* (Carlisle: Printed by Archibald Loudon, 1812), quotation on 12.

Cooper also recognized, on contentious subjects such as the scriptural Flood, the limitations of his biblical expertise, explaining, “this is a question connected with theological considerations, wherewith as a chemist I have nothing to do.”¹²⁰

As the years passed, Cooper became increasingly concerned that religious authorities were slowing the progress of scientific exploration and education in America. In September 1815 he resigned his position at Carlisle, under circumstances that motivated Virginia educator John Wood to divulge to Jefferson, “Professor Cooper’s sole motive for leaving Carlisle I believe is the bigotry and the prejudice of the Clergy who I understand usurp the control of the College.”¹²¹ In the following year he accepted the position of chair of applied chemistry and mineralogy at the University of Pennsylvania. During this period, discouraged by the oppressive atmosphere of his own alma mater, the College of William and Mary, Jefferson had been making preparations to establish a college in Virginia where education was protected from interference by religious forces. He invited Cooper as professor of natural sciences and law at the new University of Virginia in 1819, although another founder, State Senator Joseph Carrington Cabell, expressed concern about rumors that Jefferson’s candidate lacked the necessary character for the position. Dismayed, Jefferson conducted a confidential investigation among Cooper’s colleagues in Philadelphia. The Portuguese botanist José Correia da Serra reassured him that, although people misrepresented Cooper as a Unitarian with a violent temper, in truth he was “only a bitter enemy

¹²⁰ Cooper, *Introductory Lecture of Thomas Cooper*, quotation on 111-112.

¹²¹ John Wood to Thomas Jefferson, July 18, 1815, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series: Volume 8: 1 October 1814 to 31 August 1815*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 609-610, quotation on 609.

of hypocrits.”¹²² While testimonies such as Correia’s resolved the question of character, they did not quell complaints by area clergy about Cooper’s heterodox and materialist opinions. In the face of such opposition, the founders felt obligated to suspend their offer to Cooper, and he was forced to secure a chemistry professorship at South Carolina College (later the University of South Carolina) where he spent the next twenty years.¹²³

Cooper’s resentment at religious interference in scientific exploration found a new target in 1829, when Benjamin Silliman published the American edition of Robert Bakewell’s *Introduction to Geology* supplemented by his lengthy harmonization of geological evidence and the biblical chronology.¹²⁴ In his response of the same year, a sixteen-page, anonymous pamphlet titled *The Fabrication of the Pentateuch Proved*, Cooper published the first documented denunciation of the Genesis Flood as factually untrue. Pointedly cataloguing the contradictions and absurdities in the first five books of the Old Testament, he assailed the authorship and inspiration of these “forgeries” and reproached Silliman for allowing his geological teachings to be “trammelled by priestly influence.”¹²⁵ Cooper had been obligated to use Bakewell’s American text in his own geology classes, lacking an acceptable alternative, and chafed at Silliman’s unscientific inclusion of the Genesis account in his commentary. Although his outspoken

¹²² Malone, *Public Life of Thomas Cooper*, 228-247, quotation on 238.

¹²³ Herbert Baxter Adams, *Thomas Jefferson and the University of Virginia* (Washington, DC: Govt. Print. Off., 1888) 71, n. 1.

¹²⁴ Stiling, “Diminishing Deluge,” 106-113.

¹²⁵ Thomas Cooper, *The Fabrication of the Pentateuch Proved, by the Anachronisms Contained in Those Books* (second edition, Granville, Middletown, NJ: George H. Evans, 1840), quotations on 3n (trammelled by priestly influence), 12, 16 (forgeries).

religious skepticism generated alarm among his university trustees, Cooper persisted in publishing in 1833, with his name intact, the even more belligerent jeremiad *On the Connection between Geology and the Pentateuch*. The Preface of this work left no doubt that its author saw no benefit in the dialogue between Genesis and geology: “Is there any such Era as the geological occurrence of a general Deluge? Is all Diluvium to be referred to that Era? If there be no other proof in its favour but the Pentateuch, it fails.”¹²⁶ In Cooper’s view, the chronicle of a universal Flood in the Pentateuch, a document less than fully factual, amounted to no evidence at all.

When Silliman published a second American edition of Bakewell’s *Geology* in 1833, his supplement reflected the growing consensus among Anglophone geologists that the flooding responsible for shaping the earth’s surface could not reasonably be associated with the biblical Deluge.¹²⁷ His commentary focused instead on his continued efforts to accommodate the days of Creation with the geological ages:

In a country like this, where the moral feeling of the people is identified with reverence for the scriptures, the questions are often agitated :—If the six days of the creation were insufficient in time, and the events cannot all be referred to a deluge, to what period and to what state of things shall we assign them? This is a fair topic of enquiry, and demands a satisfactory answer. The subject of geology is possessed of such high interest, that it will not be permitted to slumber. Its conclusions have been supposed to jar with the scripture history: this is contemplated with alarm and displeasure by some, and with satisfaction by a few; but there is no cause for either state of feeling. It is founded upon the popular mistake, that, excepting the action of a deluge and of ordinary causes still in operation, this world was formed as we now see it, and that all its immense and various deposits were made in a very short period of time.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Thomas Cooper, *On the Connection between Geology and the Pentateuch, in a Letter to Professor Silliman, from Thomas Cooper, M.D.* (second edition, Boston: Abner Kneeland, 1837), quotation on 3.

¹²⁷ Numbers, “Aggressors, Victims, and Peacemakers,” 15-53; Stiling, “Diminishing Deluge,” 113-115.

¹²⁸ Benjamin Silliman, “Supplement by the Editor,” *An Introduction to Geology by Bakewell* (New Haven: Hezekiah Howe & Co., 1833), 389-466, quotation on 390.

Cooper's response this time was a private letter rather than a published manifesto: "You must take your own course. As to myself, I am fully persuaded that the Bible is in many respects a detestable, and in all respects an unauthenticated book: that religion is the great enemy of science; and that I am not likely to die any thing else but what I have lived."¹²⁹ Cooper's confrontation of Silliman had reached its end, but he had set a precedent for later figures to publish their own skeptical attacks on the relevance of Scripture to scientific activity. Not all who resisted scientific biblical criticism did so in the defense of religious purity; as methodological naturalism became an increasingly common stance, other defenders of scientific integrity criticized the intrusion of any religious content into the study of nature.

A smaller number of scientific practitioners condemned harmonization efforts primarily as a threat to the traditional authority of the Bible texts. These figures are particularly interesting historically because, in contradiction of the conflict thesis, their religious orthodoxy was apparently not compromised by their commitment to the natural sciences. One representative of this class of pious naturalists was the New York botanist John Torrey (1796-1873), who responded to the scientific reinterpretation of the biblical accounts from the position of orthodox Presbyterianism. Although he would earn his M.D. from the College of Physicians and Surgeons, young Torrey had also been a collector of nature, particularly plant specimens, since his boyhood in the Greenwich suburb of New York City. Through his father, William Torrey, who worked as fiscal agent for the nearby Newgate Prison, John met and befriended Amos Eaton, a prisoner with a similar interest in botany. Eaton had been convicted of forgery in his work as a lawyer and

¹²⁹ Thomas Cooper to Benjamin Silliman, December 17, 1833, in Nathan Reingold, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Henry* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975), vol. 2, 134-137, quotation on 136.

land agent and was sentenced to life imprisonment, but his friendship with John helped him to procure botanical guides and special permission to occasionally collect specimens beyond the prison gates. He taught the fundamentals of the discipline to young Torrey and, when a change of laws allowed him a pardon on the condition that he leave the state, Eaton continued his studies of natural history at Yale under Benjamin Silliman. However, he corresponded encouragingly with Torrey, who continued to study and write botany throughout and after medical school. Although Torrey practiced as a physician for a few years, his letters to Eaton indicated that his heart still belonged to the natural sciences. He moved with his new wife Eliza to serve professorial positions at West Point Military Academy in 1824; at his alma mater, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, in 1827; and finally at the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) in 1830, where he would spend the rest of his teaching career.¹³⁰

The religious atmosphere of Princeton played an important role in shaping Torrey's intellectual world. He had been raised in a strongly Calvinist family, and his Presbyterian faith remained a lifelong central influence in his interpretation of nature. While the liberal religious attitude at Harvard, for example, included a diversity of positions on the harmonization of science and Protestant thought, "Princeton science" demanded a greater degree of religious orthodoxy among its practitioners, who were expected to abide by the Old School Presbyterian doctrine of God's complete sovereignty over nature, including human nature. When Louis Agassiz moved to the United States in 1846 and was rumored to be "hostile to revealed religion," Torrey and his protégé Asa Gray became concerned enough to pay closer attention to the

¹³⁰ Christine Chapman Robbins, "John Torrey (1796-1873): His Life and Times," *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* 95:6 (November-December 1968), 515-645, on 528-549.

expatriate zoologist's writings.¹³¹ Agassiz did believe, contrary to the conventional Bible interpretation, that the Negro and Malay races had originated separately from Caucasians, although all humanity was nevertheless one species. Torrey had been planning with Agassiz to offer a public lecture series at the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but rumors of the Swiss naturalist's unorthodox ethnological position were leading subscribers to withdraw their support. Gray vouched that he had never heard Agassiz express an opinion contrary to the claim of revealed religion, and Torrey promised the College authorities that the lectures would not be religiously controversial. Reassurances notwithstanding, Torrey also wrote anxiously to his friend and colleague Joseph Henry,

Have you overlooked Agassiz's paper? He must be watched to see that he don't publish any thing that is hostile to our religious views. As I feared, he is *developing* erroneous doctrines—& if they are well received in certain quarters, he will be less cautious. I don't say that he is a decided infidel—but he shows no regard to the Bible when it seems to be in the way of his doctrines—& thus he may undermine the faith of many—especially of the young—I write thus strongly—because I know of an instance—in which a young man—religiously educated—has openly avowed infidel notions—derived—as he says—from the teachings of Agassiz.¹³²

Torrey's worries on this issue were well-founded. Agassiz' contribution to Nott and Gliddon's *Types of Humanity* four years later did much to advance the polygenist cause in the United States, and his eminence as the leading zoologist in the nation lent the volume greater credibility and helped to insulate its claims from criticism.¹³³

¹³¹ Cited in A. Hunter Dupree, *Asa Gray: American Botanist, Friend of Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), quotation on 152.

¹³² John Torrey to Joseph Henry, April 20, 1850, in Marc Rothenberg, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Henry, January 1850-December 1853: The Smithsonian Years* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), vol. 8, quotation on 36.

¹³³ Ryan Cameron MacPherson, "The Vestiges of Creation and America's Pre-Darwinian Evolution Debates: Interpreting Theology and the Natural Sciences in Three Academic Communities" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2003), 166-167; G. Blair Nelson, "Infidel Science! Polygenism in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Weekly Religious Press" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of

Within the Presbyterian orthodoxy of the Princeton community, Torrey found support for his defense of the biblical narrative in a broad network of campus colleagues, including the theologian Charles Hodge, the physicist Joseph Henry, the mathematician Albert Dod, and the educator John Maclean. His lifelong involvement in scientific research and education did not lessen his religious commitment, and Torrey provided a credible scholarly voice against the scientific interpretation of the Bible.¹³⁴

Harmonization efforts by men of science provoked a range of responses from biblical scholars, the one other constituency most interested in the question of scientific criticism of Scripture. One group of these biblicists rejected this accommodation entirely, insisting that the natural sciences wielded no authority to overturn established scriptural interpretations.¹³⁵ A well-documented example of this particular tension was expressed by the New York Presbyterian minister Gardiner Spring (1785-1873), who found occasion to articulate these concerns in his correspondence with Yale chemist Benjamin Silliman.¹³⁶ After the two men met aboard a steamer on the Mississippi in June 1854 and engaged in an extended conversation about geology and the Bible, Silliman sent the preacher some of his writings on the subject, including his

Wisconsin-Madison, 2014), 94; Asa Gray to John Torrey, January 4, 1847; January 24, 1847; February 20, [1847], No. 182; all at the Library of The New York Botanical Garden; John Torrey to Asa Gray, January 11, 1847; February 17, 1847; at Harvard Herbarium, cited in Robbins, "John Torrey," 574, n.8; Frederickson, *Black Image*, 75-76.

¹³⁴ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 95; Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Life of Charles Hodge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1880), 239-240.

¹³⁵ Stiling, "Diminishing Deluge," 214-215, 261.

¹³⁶ Gardiner Spring, *First Things: A Series of Lectures on the Great Facts and Moral Lessons First Revealed to Mankind* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1851), 39-40.

harmonizing supplement to Bakewell's *Introduction to Geology*. Spring's response reflected his staunch Calvinism and the increasingly scientifically indefensible depiction of an earth literally only thousands of years old. He invoked a set of arguments that, by the 1850s, had become a common refuge among religious critics of natural geology. First, that geological research was still too new and limited to yet be authoritative: "a science which is thus in its infancy may not diminish my confidence in the *literal* narrative of the creation as given in the first chapter of Genesis & in the fourth commandment."¹³⁷ Second, that geologists could not even agree among themselves in their conclusions; Spring dismissed the gap and day-age harmonization arguments, noting the lack of consistency among these various attempts at accommodation. While geological observation was clearly useful for understanding the earth's current state and processes, the preacher allowed, it could not shed additional light on the divine Creation as the science of philology had, since the creative act had only been revealed conclusively in Scripture. Acknowledging that he was not going to be able to change Silliman's mind about this point, Spring concluded, "We have no need of the lights of natural science, but to illustrate and to pour their radiance on the works of God. Creation is a MIRACLE, if ever there was a miracle in the world; and what need is there of scientific principles in order to explain a miracle?"¹³⁸

Also looking to philology as the only science capable of legitimately illuminating Scripture was the scholar of Greek Tayler Lewis. Unlike Spring, Lewis embraced the day-age interpretation of the Genesis creation, with each biblical "day" representing an epoch of indefinite length. However, unlike the geologists who also supported this accommodation, such

¹³⁷ Haber, *Age of the World*, 259-264, quotation on 263.

¹³⁸ Spring, *First Things*, quotation on 39.

as Benjamin Silliman and James Dwight Dana, Lewis rejected utterly the authority of external evidences to establish the true meaning of the Bible account.¹³⁹ In 1845, he reviewed the popular *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, which integrated naturalistic theories of development for the entire creation from the stars to humanity. Railing against the then-anonymous author as “an infidel, a disingenuous, unmanly infidel”¹⁴⁰ and the book as “atheism,—blank atheism, cold, cheerless, heartless, atheism,”¹⁴¹ Lewis insisted on the sufficiency of philological insights to disclose the Creator’s intentions. This claim gained greater exposure in 1855, when he published *The Six Days of Creation*, the work of two full years during which Lewis studied the creation narrative, “solely from the light of the Divine Word,” not allowing himself to be distracted by the claims of geology.¹⁴² This scholarship provoked the geologist Dana to publish a four-part review more than 150 pages long, indignant that a purported scholar would exclude entirely the natural evidences of God’s involvement in creation. He found Lewis afflicted enough by “a mind unfit for research,... a loose use of the Sacred Record, and a limited comprehension of the grandeur of its truths,” to foolishly depict God’s word and God’s works in conflict.¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Numbers, *Creation by Natural Law*, 32, 95.

¹⁴⁰ [Tayler Lewis], “Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,” *The American Review* 1 (May 1845), 525-543, quotation on 542.

¹⁴¹ Lewis, “Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,” quotation on 527.

¹⁴² Lewis, *Six Days of Creation*, quotation on 3.

¹⁴³ Dana, “Science and the Bible,” 80-129, quotation on 89.

Like Edward Hitchcock late in his career, there were also a number of biblical scholars who saw some general agreement between scientific knowledge and the Biblical accounts, but did not believe that it could be considered a correspondence at the level of specific details.¹⁴⁴ The theologian and educator Mark Hopkins (1802-1887), who served as President of Williams College for more than 35 years, lectured and preached that the relationship between external and internal forms of biblical evidence also appeared at some times to be antagonistic, despite their apparent general harmony.¹⁴⁵ In a sermon during the 1856 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, he reassured the assembly that science could only be infidel through “a false logic, taking its departures from the certainties of mathematics, and the uniformities of physical science.” While natural theologians such as Edward Hitchcock promoted a general level of concord, Hopkins advocated a careful segregation:

All knowledge is not scientific, or rather science is not all knowledge, nor can scientific knowledge in any case reach the essence of things. The inference from any particular science that there is, or is not, a God, is not a part of the science; and as to the mode of his existence, science has never “so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” She may reach general truths and laws, but of the ground out of which her phenomena spring she is utterly ignorant.¹⁴⁶

Hopkins fully supported scientific exploration, but rejected as foolhardy any detailed comparison between science and Scripture.

¹⁴⁴ Guralnick, “Geology and Religion before Darwin,” 540.

¹⁴⁵ Mark Hopkins, *Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity before the Lowell Institute, January 1844* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1846), 72-74.

¹⁴⁶ Mark Hopkins, *Science and Religion: A Sermon Delivered in the Second Presbyterian Church, Albany, on Sabbath Afternoon, August 24, 1856* (Albany: Van Benthuyssen, 1856), quotation on 24-25.

The two most knowledgeable and accomplished scholars of the Bible in mid-nineteenth-century America also responded to the biblical criticism happening within scientific networks. Both Moses Stuart and Charles Hodge (1797-1878) affirmed the usefulness of the sciences to reinterpret Scripture, within certain parameters. As a young professor at Andover Theological Seminary, Stuart's interest in the scholarly treatment of the Bible was conspicuous enough to be considered suspicious by his conservative colleagues, and the Seminary conducted an investigation of his study of German scholarship to ensure his orthodoxy.¹⁴⁷ In an unpublished series of lectures given in 1822, he strove to establish the emerging field of Biblical Hermeneutics as a legitimate science, in which the nature of language and the principles of human language usage illuminated the texts:

Shall we interpret without rule, or by rules? Who will trust an interpretation, founded upon no principle, or rule; or what rational man will feel satisfied that he has attained an adequate knowledge of the certainty of any proposition, which knowledge is the result of an interpretation made without rule? The very elements of our rational nature demand, in such a case, an interpretation made by the best rules, which can be attained.¹⁴⁸

In the midst of a proliferation of interpretive approaches, Stuart was trying to establish the authority of the orthodox Calvinist interpretation against those from Catholic, revivalist, dogmatic, philosophical, allegorical, or mystical positions.¹⁴⁹ The usefulness of his scientific biblical principles became clearer in the late 1820s when, over the course of the next several

¹⁴⁷ John Herbert Giltner, "Moses Stuart: 1780-1852" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956), 178-179, 237ff., 381-383.

¹⁴⁸ Moses Stuart, "Lectures on Hermeneutics," Lecture I, quotation on 22. Courtesy of Yale Divinity School Library, microform Ms34, reel 118.

¹⁴⁹ Giltner, "Moses Stuart," 178-179, 237ff., 381-383; Stuart, "Lectures on Hermeneutics," Lecture I (Catholic); Lectures II and III (revivalistic); Lecture III (dogmatic and philosophical); Lecture IV (allegorical and mystical).

years, Stuart reprimanded Benjamin Silliman and Edward Hitchcock for interpreting biblical texts without the knowledge or experience to capably analyze them. The field of geological science, in the first place, was still too unformed and contentious to be decisive: “The objection of geologists will deserve more serious consideration, when any two respectable authors among them ever come to agree with each other, and when the earth shall have been penetrated and examined, a little more than a eighth thousandth part of its diameter; for this has not yet been done.”¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the experts so-called of geology were no more knowledgeable of biblical philology than any layperson:

The study of [Hermeneutics] as a science, can never be expected, much less demanded of all mankind.... I am addressing those, who expect to be theologians; whose peculiar business it will be to explain the bible to others; who ought to possess more knowledge of it, than what is barely essential to their own satisfaction; & who, if there be any value in Hermeneutics, are bound to acquire a knowledge of them.¹⁵¹

Hodge was equally committed as Stuart to the progress of science, but he found accommodation an increasingly elusive goal. The most important theologian and most influential theological educator in mid-nineteenth-century America, this Princeton scholar was also thoroughly knowledgeable about the sciences. He had studied anatomy and physiology, kept himself exceptionally well informed about science throughout his career, and included significant scientific content in his important theological journal *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*. However, as scholars of nature increasingly invoked methodological naturalism to lay claim to territories of knowledge that had once been the sole province of the

¹⁵⁰ Moses Stuart, *A Hebrew Chrestomathy, Designed as the First Volume of a Course of Hebrew Study* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1829), quotation on 118.

¹⁵¹ Stuart, “Lectures on Hermeneutics,” Lecture II, quotation on 22.

Bible, Hodge began to worry about the possible infidel tendencies of science.¹⁵² Although he had accommodated geology and astronomy with his faith relatively painlessly, he noted that the topic of human origins

is not purely a question of science; at least not of natural science. It is partly a historical question; and in a still higher and more commanding sense it is a religious question. It is not, therefore, like the questions touching revelation which grew out of the early inductions and generalizations of astronomy, geology, and antiquarian research. It is not simply a question of interpretation. It enters into the heart of the very object for which the scriptures were given.¹⁵³

Hodge also expressed concern about the rise of scientism, the inclination of students of science to restrict their attention to naturalistic explanations and to dismiss other methods:

as religion does not rest on the testimony of the senses, that is on scientific evidence, the tendency of scientific men is to ignore its claims.... the fact is painfully notorious that there is an antagonism between scientific men as a class, and religious men as a class.... The first cause of the alienation in question is, that the two parties adopt different rules of evidence, and thus can hardly avoid arriving at different conclusions.¹⁵⁴

This gradual exclusion of religious concerns and theological expertise, Hodge concluded, was resulting in the shrinking authority of evangelical Protestant thought in scholarly circles.¹⁵⁵

Lastly, the various scientific attempts by men of science to reinterpret the Bible attracted the participation of a growing number of amateurs, whose arguments were sometimes given as much attention and import as the conclusions of established scholars. For example, in 1848 the

¹⁵² Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 93-96.

¹⁵³ [Hodge], review of *Unity of the Human Race*, quotation on 315.

¹⁵⁴ Charles Hodge, *What is Darwinism?* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1874), 126-131, quotation on 131.

¹⁵⁵ Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 93-95.

New York lawyer William Frederick Van Amringe published a lengthy, meandering book, *An Investigation of the Theories of the Natural History of Man*, refuting scientific biblical criticism on non-scientific grounds. Relying on his own instinct, informal observations of nature, and newspaper accounts, Van Amringe argued that all humans were descended from Adam and Eve, although God had intervened soon after the Flood to divide humanity into four distinct species. With no apparent sense of irony, the lawyer belittled those who held forth on human origins without the education or experience to treat the subject rigorously:

It must be evident that men who come to the investigation of this subject, with minds so prepossessed, are as unfit for it, as are those who engage in it with the hope of making it an instrument for the destruction of religion, by adopting the contrary theory. Both of them have theories to maintain. Both seek for facts and reasons to support them, with a zeal which warps their judgments—the first no doubt honestly deceived; the latter, if as honestly deceived, certainly not as honestly employed.¹⁵⁶

Like many other amateur contributions, Van Amringe's volume was given essentially the same popular attention and consideration as scholarly writings; his arguments were disseminated widely in the *Democratic Review* and cited among more rigorous subsequent works about the origins of humanity.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion: Students of Nature and the Growing Authority of the Sciences

Like their counterparts in religious occupations, American men of science widely subscribed to the Protestant Congruence and understood the study of nature as another form of exploration of the Creator's work. They could claim the harmonization of scientific knowledge and Christian belief as long as they invoked the Bible in generalities only or engaged in a creative reading of

¹⁵⁶ "Natural History of Man," *The United States Democratic Review* 26:142 (April 1850), 327-345, quotation on 330.

¹⁵⁷ Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, 133-134.

the most troublesome passages. Notable in the narratives of pious scientific activity is the pattern that, unlike religious scholars, men of science did not address the intersection of natural knowledge and biblical knowledge at a broad, philosophical level. The one prominent exception to this generalization in the Anglophone world was philosopher of science William Whewell, the inspiration to Theodore Parker's promotion of scientific biblical criticism. Rather, practitioners of science approached these questions from the specific perspective of their research project and its perceived points of conflict with a biblical cosmology. For example, one prominent potential conflict attracting the interest of many earth scientists was the search for geological evidence of the global flood described in the Genesis narrative.

The Protestant Congruence entailed the conclusion that any disagreement between scientific facts and the Bible narrative must have resulted from a misunderstanding of one of the Two Books. When faithful men of science encountered such an apparent conflict, it was overwhelmingly the Scripture texts that they reinterpreted, rather than their observations of nature. Particularly influential in this activity were the American geologists Benjamin Silliman and Edward Hitchcock, who were willing to press beyond generalizations of harmony and demand agreement at the level of individual words. Their promotion of the day-age and gap interpretations of the Bible reached a broad audience of scholars and laypeople, especially through Silliman's *American Journal of Science*.

Although these creative interpretations reassured many science-minded Protestants of the surety of agreement between the two spheres, the differing explanations for humanity's origin could not easily be reconciled. The biblical claim for God's unique creation by divine fiat of

Adam and Eve provided the cornerstone for the Christian theology of human moral responsibility, and was not easily reinterpreted to a less specific version. Although the alternative explanation of theistic evolution satisfied many Protestants committed to the authority of scientific fact, the reach of the Protestant Congruence was nearing its limit. Faithful enthusiasts of science had assured skeptics about the religious value of natural evidence, but their entrenched commitment to empiricism increasingly seemed a dead-end from which they could not easily extricate themselves with their Christian beliefs intact.

Chapter Three

The American Protestant Engagement with Scientific Biblical Criticism in the Wake of British Controversies

*After this initial admission has been made, everything further is but a question of degrees. The Scripture is no longer reliable in its present form. The inspiration of its writers has been surrendered. We have lost our infallible guide.*¹

— William Henry Green

Introduction

British and American Protestants clashed after the mid-nineteenth century over the issue of biblical inspiration and whether the Bible was exempt from critical analysis. Provoking this debate were three controversial British developments in which prominent religious leaders insisted on the admissibility of external sources of knowledge, such as history, science, and rationalism. The 1860 publication of the collection *Essays and Reviews*, the heterodox scholarship of Anglican bishop John William Colenso (1814-1883) in the early 1860s, and the iconoclastic research and lengthy heresy trial of biblical scholar William Robertson Smith (1846-1894), ending in 1881, were compelled primarily not by new scientific knowledge, but by the promotion of higher biblical criticism. While news of the earlier two incidents elicited mostly suspicion among Protestant readers in the United States, the example of Robertson Smith inspired younger evangelical leaders to promote scientific and historical biblical criticism as a way of encouraging greater scriptural literacy. Despite occurring overseas, these three upheavals

¹ William Henry Green, *The Higher Criticism of the Pentateuch* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895), quotation on 172.

within British Protestantism serve as a necessary part of the background to the formation, spread, and reception of American scientific biblical criticism.²

Historian of science John Hedley Brooke notes that these three British controversies over higher biblical criticism wielded more influence than scientific developments in disrupting traditional biblical authority. Responding to the observation of anthropologist Mary Douglas that religious activity is not simply a system of ideas about the universe, but also a constellation of social relations, Brooke concluded, “In modern times, the expansion of secularism can be correlated with social, political and economic transformations having little direct connection with science but having much to do with the weakening of the social ties that religious affiliation has provided.”³

Brooke understood this relational disruption as the secularization of Protestantism and reinforced the conflict thesis by citing other sources of secularization. However, rather than interpreting these developments as the *lessening* of commitment to a biblically centered religious worldview, I will interpret the outcome as a *modified* form of biblical Christianity. The repercussions of these three controversies included a rearrangement of the social and

² Walter H. Conser, Jr., *God and the Natural World: Religion and Science in Antebellum America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 30-32, 73-74; Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 140-52; Victor Shea and William Whitla, “*Essays and Reviews*”: *The 1860 Text and Its Reading* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 122-123, 330-331, 485-490, 545ff.

³ John Hedley Brooke, “Science and secularization,” *The Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 103-123, quotation on 112-113; Mary Douglas, “The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change,” *Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 111 (1982), 1-19.

ecclesiastical order of Anglophone Protestantism and the larger cultural landscape of Britain and the United States, including the role of scientific knowledge. These debates over the spread of higher criticism focused at least as much on the trusted roles occupied—and purportedly betrayed—by heterodox leaders as on the truth of the religious ideas themselves. Whether or not it is accurate to characterize these developments as secularization, it is clear that the controversies also involved a widespread reevaluation, not rejection, of the Bible’s authority. As historian James Reidy observed about the British setting, “The story of the impact of the Higher Criticism in England is at the center of the religious history of the Victorian Age, a history characterized by anguished doubt and a loss of faith on one hand and the same anguished doubt producing a new understanding of the grounds of biblical faith on the other.”⁴

This chapter chronicles the major developments in the three British controversies over modern biblical criticism, as well as responses from the most prominent and respected source of disapproval, Princeton theological professor William Henry Green. I give particular attention to the incidents most relevant to the relationship between science and the Bible, which generally centers around the question of inspiration, or the Christian doctrine addressing the divine origin of the biblical writings, upon which they are attested as true. Another significant thread running through this arc is the fear that these British controversies represent a larger, concerted movement from within Protestant leadership to overturn the traditional status and authority of the Bible.

⁴ James Edward Reidy, “The Higher Criticism in England and the Periodical Debate of the 1860s” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971), quotation on 10.

The secondary literature about the impact of this activity begins in 1956 with an unpublished dissertation offering a primarily philosophical exploration, with later scholars adding a more historical treatment and analysis in the context of science-and-religion debates. The most prolific *Essays and Reviews* historian was undoubtedly Minnesota historian Josef Altholz (1933-2003), who chronicled the volume's legacy from a variety of perspectives, including the history of Darwinism and the analysis of genre. The more recent treatment of this subject has been remarkably thorough, including Victor Shea and William Whitla's voluminous monograph *Essays and Reviews: The 1860 Text and Its Meaning* (2000), which ably integrates insights from various disciplines, theretofore only treated in journal articles. Most valuable in this work is significant material about responses to the American edition of *Essays and Reviews*, although these authors agree that the history of this collection in the United States remains a prominent lacuna in the scholarship.⁵ Historian of religion Lydia Willsky-Ciollo's work on the development of liberal Christianity in the United States supports my conclusion that this disruption of traditional biblical authority might be better understood as the development of a distinctly modernizing form of Protestantism rather than as the supplanting of religion.⁸

⁵ Mark Francis, "The Origins of *Essays and Reviews*: an interpretation of Mark Pattison in the 1850s," *The Historical Journal* 17:4 (1974), 797-811; W. H. Brock and R. M. Macleod, "The Scientists' Declaration: Reflexions on Science and Belief in the Wake of *Essays and Reviews*," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 9:1 (March 1976), 39-66. Altholz's relevant works include "Periodical Origins and Implications of *Essays and Reviews*," *Victorian Periodicals Newsletter* 10:3 (Sept. 1977), 140-154; "The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to *Essays and Reviews*, 1860-1864," *Church History* 51:2 (June 1982), 186-197; "Early Periodical Responses to *Essays and Reviews*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 19:2 (Summer 1986), 50-56; and "A Tale of Two Controversies: Darwinism in the Debate over *Essays and Reviews*," *Church History* 63:1 (March 1994), 50-59. Also, Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, passim.

⁸ Lydia Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 14ff.

As we see an accumulation of attention on the challenges posed by biblical criticism to the scriptural views of nature, this dissertation will highlight the actual testimony and activity of historical actors who embraced and promoted the new approaches to interpretation. My particular contribution to this literature is to recognize the enthusiastic American consumption of reporting on these three British controversies as an important step in the formation of a tradition of scientific biblical criticism in the United States. The extension of the scientific principle of universal lawfulness to the Bible established a precedent of further applying external sources of knowledge, most notably history and science, to the previously sacrosanct texts.

The Enemy at Undefended Gates: German Criticism in the Church of England

The spread of German biblical scholarship among British theologians and clergy drew considerable attention to the possibility of overturning traditional understandings of Scripture and its appropriate criticism. Although Britons had scarcely been involved in modern approaches to interpretation before 1860, a burst of controversial theological debate among respected religious leaders soon generated interest and alarm throughout the Anglophone Protestant world.¹⁰ The earliest of these significant developments was the 1860 publication of *Essays and Reviews*, a collection of treatises by seven progressive Anglican churchmen praising the rise of naturalism in modern scriptural scholarship. The articles explored the impact of the emerging modern sciences and especially of higher biblical criticism on the traditional doctrine of the Bible's divine origin and, in turn, on the spheres of theology, education, philosophy, history, literature, and politics. Although the authors had not been guided or edited in their messages,

¹⁰ Jerry Wayne Brown, *The Rise of Biblical Criticism in America, 1800-1870: The New England Scholars* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1969), 116 n13.

together they presented a notably unified challenge to the Church of England's doctrine of inspiration, advocating instead for the embrace of various external bodies of knowledge in biblical interpretation. The shared message of the essays was summed up by the final contributor, Anglican theologian and cleric Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893), who concluded bluntly: "Interpret the Scripture like any other book."¹¹ This collection was widely read—far outselling *The Origin of Species*, for example—and provoked considerable reaction among British theologians and leaders in the Church of England, producing what another historian has called the "greatest religious crisis of the Victorian age."¹² A year later the well-known Anglican bishop John William Colenso, serving in the South African colony of Natal, published his own naturalistic interpretation of selected Bible narratives, and secular and religious periodicals alike censured his work harshly.¹³ The third and most influential controversy was the heresy trial of Church of Scotland biblical scholar William Robertson Smith for his heterodox articles in the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, questioning the authorship of the book of Deuteronomy and the truth of biblical history.¹⁴ These three events involved prominent and trusted leaders of British Protestantism, and the resulting publicity attracted considerable and sustained attention in both Britain and America, through religious and secular periodicals, as well as evangelical efforts to

¹¹ Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 3-4, 6, 33, 42.

¹² Ieuan Ellis, *Seven Against Christ: A Study of 'Essays and Reviews'* (Leiden: Brill Publishing, 1980), quotation on ix.

¹³ Timothy Larsen, "Bishop Colenso and His Critics: the Strange Emergence of Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain," 42-63, and John W. Rogerson, "Colenso in the World of Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Ferment," 127-135, both in Jonathan A. Draper, ed., *The Eye of the Storm: Bishop John William Colenso and the Crisis of Biblical Interpretation* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2003).

¹⁴ Gordon Kempt Booth, "William Robertson Smith: The Scientific, Literary, and Cultural Context from 1866 to 1881" (PhD dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1999), available on <http://www.gkbenterprises.org.uk/wrs.htm>.

revive and modernize biblical literacy. Although these controversies originated largely independently, they gave the appearance of an organized movement of naturalistic infidelity, a coordinated attack with German weapons upon the divinely conferred special status of the Bible. The importance of these developments cannot be overstated, historian Ferenc Szasz concludes:

[American biblical scholars] did not really come to grips with higher criticism until the British began serious biblical study. British scholars were less willing to accept the naturalistic assumptions of their Continental counterparts, and, instead, began examining the Bible from their own perspective, a supernatural one. The trials of Bishop Colenso (1862) and William Robertson Smith (1876) were probably the events which brought higher criticism to America's attention; and because they were so intellectually unprepared, the country suffered from the impact rather severely. There had been attacks on the Bible before in American history—the militant [sic] rationalists had always directed their efforts along these lines—but they were on the defensive and had the weight of history to overcome. What was different was to find the book being attacked by men who remained inside the existing denominations.¹⁵

Unlike the deists and freethinkers from Britain's and America's Enlightenment past, the authors of *Essays and Reviews* could not easily be dismissed as enemies of the Bible and Christian civilization.¹⁶

Essays and Reviews: Naturalizing the Divine Origins of Scripture

The *Essays and Reviews* controversy has been characterized repeatedly as the greatest intellectual crisis of the Victorian Church. Like John Hedley Brooke, literary critic Lionel Trilling observed that the encroachment of the natural sciences was not the chief source of religious anxiety among thinking people in Victorian England; rather, he wrote, "It was historical

¹⁵ Ferenc M. Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders: The Roles of William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and William Jennings Bryan in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy" (Ph.D dissertation, The University of Rochester, 1969), quotation on 27-28.

¹⁶ Charles Farace, *The History of Old Testament Criticism in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1939), 33ff., 84.

criticism far more than science which jarred the foundations of orthodoxy.”¹⁷ Historical scholarship and literary criticism established new principles and standards for the analysis of classical works, and it wasn’t long before Continental scholars further extended these methods to the Pentateuch, raising unsettling questions about the Bible’s authorship and historicity. The Danish-German scholar Barthold Niebuhr was the first acknowledged historian to apply broadly the “scientific method” of historical criticism to classical literature. In his magisterial *History of Rome* (1811-1832), he invoked source criticism—the rigorous analysis of a text’s sources—to appraise the early works of Livy as overwhelmingly mythological; significantly, he did not reject them as worthless, as other scholars had done. More than any other influence, the historical methods of Niebuhr provided a solid foundation for modern “scientific” biblical criticism, profoundly modifying British scholarly conceptions of revelation and inspiration, and suggesting new models for rethinking the authority of Scripture. German classicist Friedrich Wolf asserted a similar influence on critical method in his 1796 *Prolegomena to Homer*, demonstrating an exacting and systematic approach in establishing the composite authorship of Homer’s poetry.¹⁸ Some already warned that such critical scholarship could also be applied destructively to the biblical texts, and one reviewer criticized these new interpretations as “crude and dangerous

¹⁷ Lionel Trilling, *Matthew Arnold* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1939), 308.

¹⁸ Reidy, “Higher Criticism in England,” 11-12, 27, 33-34, 37.

speculations.”¹⁹ Despite these apprehensions, Wolf in fact urged the extension of these very methods to include Old Testament history.²⁰

The earliest references to German critical activity were dismissed in England as so obviously incompatible with Christian faith as to pose no threat to orthodoxy. Many British scholars associated this scholarship with the Deist movement and therefore considered it an enemy already vanquished by the work of Christian apologists William Paley and John Butler. A historian of biblical scholarship reflected, “it seems strange now that the opponents of Higher Criticism should have played such a prominent part in introducing it to England... but confident that truth, and ultimately scholarship, were on their side, they had no reason for hiding what the Germans were doing.”²¹ However, as the work of the Germans became better known, their influence became a more serious source of anxiety about the defense of biblical orthodoxy in the face of growing evidence to the contrary. Central to this rising concern was the doctrine of inspiration, addressing the relation between the human authorship and God’s authorship of Scripture. The canonical Protestant interpretation taught that the pens of the biblical authors had been divinely guided with such precision that God could be described as the true author of the Bible, although this notion of inspiration became more difficult to reconcile with the growing

¹⁹ A Non-Alarmist, “A Few Words on our Relations with Russia, including some Remarks on a recent Publication by Colonel De Lacy Evans, entitled ‘Designs of Russia’,” *The Quarterly Review* 39:77 (January 1829), quotation on 8-9.

²⁰ Vernon F. Storr, *The Development of English Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 1800-1860* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1913), 117ff.; James Robert Thrane, “The Rise of Higher Criticism in England, 1800-1870” (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1956) ii-iii, *passim*.

²¹ Willis B. Glover, *Evangelical Nonconformists and Higher Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Independent Press, 1954), quotation on 41.

acknowledgment of non-factual content in the Bible texts.²² Throughout the nineteenth century, discoveries in natural science challenged the Genesis account of creation, and historical-literary criticism revealed fatal flaws in the historical narratives of the Old and New Testaments. It was this latter provocation in the form of higher criticism, and not in the latest scientific discoveries, that most discomfited Victorian Christians and necessitated their reevaluation of the doctrine of inspiration. James Reidy concludes, “problems with the Bible, like the question of admitting legends in its narratives, and not problems with science, like man’s descent from the apes, were the major cause of the decline of religion in Victorian England as well as the cause of the most drastic adjustment the English churches had yet made to new knowledge in modern times.”²³ For example, as Anglicans navigated the *Essays and Reviews* controversy, many of them were moved to reconsider their understanding of inspiration and the Bible’s authorship, ultimately contributing to a naturalized form of biblical Protestantism rather than the elimination of it.²⁴

Although written independently of one another, the seven treatises in *Essays and Reviews* all expressed approval of the effects of higher criticism and the natural sciences on biblical knowledge. While the challenges raised by scientific discoveries were generally accommodated with relatively little difficulty, higher criticism suggested fundamental discrepancies with the traditional doctrine of inspiration and demanded a more serious response. The essays’ authors

²² George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, eds. Hatch and Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79-100, on 88-89.

²³ Reidy, “Higher Criticism in England,” 8-11, 57, 66, quotation on 10-11.

²⁴ Henry B. Smith, *Introduction to Christian Theology* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1883), 153, 213.

had been leaders within the moderate and inclusive Broad Church movement and were among the first to appreciate the promise and the threat of higher criticism. They recognized that the time had come to share with the laity, in plain English rather than German or Latin, the most pressing doctrinal questions raised by the new methods of interpretation.²⁵

The last of the seven essays, “The Interpretation of Scripture” by Oxford professor of Greek Benjamin Jowett, best articulated the central message of the book. Observing that scholars of Plato or Sophocles would not tolerate the same inconsistent and even contradictory interpretations that Scripture had endured, Jowett concluded from philological and historical evidence that the only way humanity could impartially uncover the true meaning of the Bible was to interpret it “like any other book.”²⁶ That is, biblical scholars must relinquish their conventional commitment to dogmatic, doctrinal, or institutional positions and refrain from assumptions such as divine authorship; the true meaning of Scripture would emerge from the honest scrutiny of evidence concerning its composition, redaction, and reception. He lamented,

the meaning of classical authors is known with comparative certainty; and the interpretation of them seems to rest on a scientific basis. It is not, therefore, to philological or historical difficulties that the greater part of the uncertainty in the interpretation of Scripture is to be attributed.... We might remark that in our own country, and in the present generation especially, the interpretation of Scripture had assumed an apologetic character, as though making an effort to defend itself against some supposed inroad of science and criticism.²⁷

²⁵ Reidy, “Higher Criticism in England,” 12, 66, 72, 114; R. B. Kennard, *“Essays & Reviews”: Their Origin, History, General Character & Significance...* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1863), 23.

²⁶ Benjamin Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), 330-433, quotation on 377.

²⁷ Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” quotation on 334, 340.

Jowett observed that scholars had already overcome these difficulties in Germany, and that “among German commentators there is, for the first time in the history of the world, an approach to agreement and certainty.”²⁸ However, he blamed the Church of England’s attachment to the traditional doctrine of inspiration for their failure to follow Germany’s example:

In natural science it is felt to be useless to build on assumptions; in history we look with suspicion on *a priori* ideas of what ought to have been; in mathematics, when a step is wrong, we pull the house down until we reach the point at which the error is discovered. But in theology it is otherwise; there the tendency has been to conceal the unsoundness of the foundation under the fairness and loftiness of the superstructure.²⁹

Essays and Reviews was not the only work of its time questioning the authority of Christian thought in its sway over Victorian society, indicating that the intellectual shift was occurring outside the Church as well. The period also saw John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty*, Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man*, Thomas Henry Huxley’s *Man’s Place in Nature*, Charles Lyell’s *Antiquity of Man*, and John Robert Seeley’s *Ecce Homo*, to name only a few similarly heterodox works. Knowledgeable readers were thus confronted from multiple sources with the claim that biblical literacy required the admission of thorough historical and cultural context. However, these secular works were easier to disregard than the radical opinions voiced by trusted Anglican leaders.³⁰

The shock over such naturalistic positions being voiced from within the Church leadership, rather than from without as the Deists had attacked, inspired a flurry of debate in

²⁸ Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” quotation on 340.

²⁹ Jowett, “On the Interpretation of Scripture,” quotation on 342.

³⁰ Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 6-7, 25-26; James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 224.

sermons, pamphlets, articles, books, and eventually heresy tribunals. Perhaps unsurprisingly, orthodox Anglicans promptly expressed their opposition to *Essays and Reviews*, defending their conventional position of rational supernaturalism and biblical exceptionalism, while Broad Church leaders generally welcomed the volume.³¹ The entire British periodical press was drawn into the debate; Reidy marvels, “During the year 1861, almost all the leading journals of the land had something to say about *Essays and Reviews*.”³² As many of these articles summarized the essays at length, a significant portion of the reading public was exposed to the details of modern biblical criticism in England, and could reach their own conclusions about whether the views deserved to be condemned.³³

In addition to the thriving periodical debate, the *Essays and Reviews* controversy also provoked a number of published volumes. The two most important books were themselves compilations of essays, each under the editorship of a bishop and offering a more thorough treatment of the controversy. *Replies to “Essays and Reviews”* was edited by Church of England Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and took an especially strident attitude toward the controversial collection. The preface to *Replies* condemned the theology of *Essays and Reviews* as “a tricked out Atheism” in the guise of Pantheism, and went on to attack each of the individual essays; although promising a “calm, comprehensive, scholarlike declaration” in response, the content of

³¹ Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 3, 5-6.

³² Reidy, “Higher Criticism in England,” 140-145, 177, quotation on 191.

³³ [Samuel Wilberforce], “Essays and Reviews,” *Quarterly Review* 109 (January 1861), 248-306; Linda K. Hughes, “The January 1861 *Quarterly Review* as Genre, Media Event, and Research Heuristic,” *Victorian Review* 38:2 (Fall 2012), 23-27, on 24-25; Jonathan Cutmore, ed., *Conservatism and the Quarterly Review: A Critical Analysis* (London: Pickering & Chatto: 2007), passim; [Frederic Harrison], “Neo-Christianity,” *Westminster Review* 74 (October 1860), 293-332.

Replies was dominated by a shrill and adversarial tone.³⁴ The more important book-length response was *Aids to Faith*, bringing together the opinions of nine intellectually and ecclesiastically significant contributors. Under the editorial leadership of William Thomson, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, the essayists in *Aids to Faith* revisited the arguments of *Essays and Reviews* from a doctrinally orthodox position. Such was the authority of these nine essayists that *Aids to Faith* captured the attention of a significant and influential audience throughout the Anglophone world.³⁵

One additional reaction to *Essays and Reviews* that attracted the greatest international attention was the effort to prosecute the essayists in ecclesiastical court. By February 1861, in response to Bishop Wilberforce's encouragement, local clergy associations had begun drafting petitions and manifestoes. The print controversy quickly moved to the Church courts, and two of the contributors were found guilty but appealed the decision to the secular courts and a different standard of law, which concluded in their favor. Benjamin Jowett was also tried in the Chancellor's Court at Oxford and punished by withholding the salary raise for his Regius professorship. The sensation of these heresy trials did much to raise the public's awareness of the controversy over *Essays and Reviews* and of the ineffectual authority of a secular judiciary to evaluate doctrinal accusations.³⁶ Reidy observes, "The judgments of the courts in the litigation

³⁴ E. M. Goulburn et. al., *Replies to "Essays and Reviews"* (Oxford: John Henry and James Parker, 1862), xi-xvi, quotations on xi, xiii.

³⁵ Josef L. Altholz, "The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to 'Essays and Reviews', 1860-1864," *Church History* 51:2 (June 1982), 186-197, on 190 n16; Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 43-46; William Thomson, ed., *Aids to Faith: A Series of Theological Essays by Several Writers* (London: John Murray, 1861).

³⁶ Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 6ff., 805.

over *Essays and Reviews* were more conclusive and evoked more significant comment than any of the published replies.”³⁷

The broad and heated coverage given to *Essays and Reviews* extended the higher criticism debates beyond scholarly circles to the reading laity. Although under-informed lay opinions formed only a comparative trickle at first, by the 1880s they would constitute an alarming flood. Irish historian William Lecky noted,

No change in English life during the latter half of the nineteenth century is more conspicuous than the great enlargement of the range of permissible opinions on religious subjects. Opinions and arguments which not many years ago were confined to small circles and would have drawn down grave social penalties, have become the common places of the drawing-room and of the boudoir. The first very marked change in this respect followed, I think, the publication in 1860 of the ‘*Essays and Reviews*,’ and the effect of this book in making the religious questions which it discussed familiar to the great body of educated men was probably by far the most important of its consequences.³⁸

Arthur P. Stanley, a Broad Church priest and Regius Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oxford, lamented the repercussions of publishing *Essays and Reviews* in English. The tradition of printing theological works in Latin or German had kept them “to the public at large hermetically sealed,” but with this volume readily accessible to the public, “conclusions arrived at by the life-long labour of a great German theologian are pitchforked into the face of the English public, who never heard of them before, with hardly a shred of argument to clothe their repulsive forms.”³⁹ Furthermore, the prominence of the controversy only made the essays even

³⁷ Reidy, “Higher Criticism in England,” 241.

³⁸ William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *Democracy and Liberty* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1896), v.1, quotation on 510-511.

³⁹ [Arthur P. Stanley], “*Essays and Reviews*,” *Edinburgh Review* 113:230 (April 1861), 461-500, quotations on 473-474.

more beguiling to the unprepared reader: “It was not till the Reviewers had opened fire on them that the book reached its third edition. It was not till the Bishops had condemned it that it leaped, week by week, in to the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth gigantic editions which have crowded Paternoster Row.”⁴⁰ While heresy trials (or even the threat thereof) might have dissuaded religious leaders from infidel positions, it was not as simple to discourage enthusiastic laypeople from exploring this newly publicized scholarship. Cambridge philosopher Henry Sidgwick scolded the Church over its heavy-handed response to *Essays and Reviews*, “The age when ecclesiastical censures were sufficient in such cases has passed away.... For philosophy and history alike have taught [the laity] to seek not what is ‘safe,’ but what is true.”⁴¹

While it is unsurprising that Britons reacted strongly to signs of growing heterodoxy among their own religious leaders, *Essays and Reviews* provoked an important response in the United States as well. Five pirated American editions of the collection were published, with the first available in Boston by November 1860.⁴² This first reprinting was retitled *Recent Inquiries in Theology* and included an introduction by the American Unitarian clergyman Frederic Henry Hedge, who lauded the essays as representing “a new era in Anglican theology.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Stanley, “Essays and Reviews,” quotation on 473.

⁴¹ Bart Schultz, *Henry Sidgwick: Eye of the Universe: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), quotation on 45.

⁴² Shea and Whitla, *Essays and Reviews*, 23.

⁴³ Frederic H. Hedge, ed., *Recent Inquiries in Theology, by Eminent English Churchmen; Being “Essays and Reviews”* (Boston: Walker, Wise, and Company, 1860), quotation on viii.

The earliest American reviews appeared in the Unitarian press in the autumn of 1861 and described *Essays and Reviews* knowledgeably and approvingly. The family periodical *Monthly Religious Magazine* noted that a preliminary reading already offered cause for enthusiasm, and expressed special appreciation for these writings coming from within Church leadership:

We have had before what are called ‘apologies’ for Revelation, and we have had attacks upon the evidences, objections to miracles, to the genuineness of various books of Scripture; but here we are carried beyond the outworks to the citadel and centre, and are brought into communion with men who are so strong in faith that they undertake to show the compatibility of the freest handling of the letter, and of everything external, with the heartiest conviction of the everlasting power, worth, and beauty of the Gospel.⁴⁴

The *Christian Examiner* printed a fifty-page review that included a summary of each essay and noted, “the contents of this volume in general advance views precisely like those which have for half a century been maintained in our own journal.”⁴⁵ Indicating a more thorough understanding of higher biblical criticism and the particular issues at stake than in other religious journals, the *Examiner* acknowledged the dimensions of “scientific criticism,” including:

such points as the age of the world, the unity of the race, the flood, the origin of diverse tongues, the longevity of the patriarchs, the authorship of the Pentateuch, the nature of prophecy, the discrepancies between Kings and Chronicles, the phenomena presented by a comparison of the four Gospels, theories of inspiration, and the harmony or discord between secular and sacred records.⁴⁶

Likely mindful of the recent split within Unitarianism over the same issue, the most serious concern the reviewer raised was about the “excess of dogmatism on the side of Rationalism” in Rowland Williams’ essay.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “The Questionings of Believers: *Recent Inquiries in Theology*,” *Monthly Religious Magazine* 24:4 (October 1860), 336-347, quotation on 340.

⁴⁵ “Old Faith and New Knowledge,” *Christian Examiner* 69:3 (November 1860), 351-401, quotation on 378.

⁴⁶ “Old Faith and New Knowledge,” quotation on 373.

⁴⁷ “Old Faith and New Knowledge,” quotation on 385.

In contrast, the more mainstream Protestant periodicals typically dismissed the controversy as merely science versus religion or German infidelity, or only alluded to lower criticism, that is, philological analysis. The Episcopalian *American Quarterly Church Review* sniffed, “It is German Rationalism; nothing more, and nothing less,” but in a later review condemned the essayists at length as actively malicious toward the Bible.⁴⁸ The *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review*, recognized as “the strongest theological journal in the English-speaking world,”⁴⁹ interpreted the controversy as a conflict with scientific knowledge, including the recently published *Origin of Species*.⁵⁰ The Congregationalist *New Englander and Yale Review*, generally friendly toward scientific developments, saw both natural science and critical analysis as sources of tension with traditional Christian thought. However, even this rare acknowledgment of biblical scholarship was limited to the lower criticism; the distinctive arguments of the higher criticism were not yet acknowledged in most periodicals.⁵¹

The corrosive effects of modern scholarship began slowly in the United States, with the impact of *Essays and Reviews* occurring largely among Old Testament scholars and studious

⁴⁸ “Recent Inquiries in Theology,” *American Quarterly Church Review, and Ecclesiastical Register* 13:4 (January 1861), 677-680, quotation on 679; “Recent Inquiries in Theology Examined,” *American Quarterly Church Review, and Ecclesiastical Register* 14:2 (July 1861), 275-358.

⁴⁹ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina press, 1977), 35.

⁵⁰ “The New Oxford School; or Broad Church Liberalism,” *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 33:1 (January 1861), 59-84.

⁵¹ “The Present Attitude of the Church toward Critical and Scientific Inquiry,” *New Englander and Yale Review* 19:2 (April 1861), 323-351.

clergy. Although modest, this spread of ideas provided a clear prelude to the growing engagement in the 1870s and 1880s of a well-read Protestant laity with the emerging awareness of scientific biblical criticism.⁵²

Bishop John Colenso: Rationalistic Corruption of the Priestly Office

Similar concerns over the factuality and authority of the Old Testament resurged in both Britain and the United States in 1862, when Anglican bishop John William Colenso published a naturalist critique of the Pentateuch, the books traditionally attributed to Moses.⁵³ Already known in the Anglophone world for his science and mathematics textbooks, Colenso was gaining fame as a naturalist when he accepted the bishopric of the South African colony of Natal in 1853. He had already begun questioning the inerrancy of the Pentateuch and reading the arguments for and against German higher criticism. Despite the expectation that he would uphold the Church of England's traditional teachings, Colenso continued to interpret the Bible in naturalistic and rationalistic terms in his work in Natal. Already stirring up controversy among Anglicans in the late 1850s with his opinions on the place of native African peoples and customs in the Christian Church, he provoked a much greater backlash with his 1862 work *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined*, a five-volume argument of the physical or arithmetical implausibility of many of the Bible's claims. Among the passages of Moses he dismissed as "unhistorical" were

- The flight to Egypt of Jacob and his offspring, including his great grandsons, at a time when he could not have been more than 44 years of age (Genesis 46:6);

⁵² Turner, *Philology*, 226.

⁵³ Ronald L. Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 113-119.

- The departure of two million Hebrews from Egypt, with enough tents to accommodate them all—an impossibly large cargo (Exodus 16:16); and
- God’s command to Moses to gather all of the Hebrews at the door of the tabernacle—again, far too many people to accommodate (Leviticus 8:3-4).

By Colenso’s reasoning, the “plain meaning” of many of these Scripture narratives was simply unsupportable. However, the Bishop did not believe that these discrepancies invalidated Christian belief: “Our belief in the Living God remains as sure as ever, though not the Pentateuch only, but the whole Bible, were removed. It is written on our hearts by God’s own Finger, as surely as by the hand of the Apostle in the Bible, that ‘GOD IS, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.’”⁵⁴

The reactions of biblical scholars to Colenso’s critical treatment of the Pentateuch also served to publicize further his scientific evaluation of Scripture and contributed to the growing suspicion of a groundswell of infidelity among Protestant leadership.⁵⁵ One of the earliest extended American responses was from William Henry Green (1824-1900), a young professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. Although he would eventually become the dominant voice among American Old Testament scholars defending traditional interpretations from modern biblical criticism, Green’s response to the “Zulu Bishop” was his first public foray into debates

⁵⁴ John William Colenso, *The Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua Critically Examined* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, & Green, 1862), vol. I, 12, 21-30, 31-34, 45-47, quotation on 12.

⁵⁵ Robert Lee Carter, “The ‘Message of the Higher Criticism’: The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 13; Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew*, 113-119; Peter Enns, “William Henry Green and the Authorship of the Pentateuch: Some Historical Considerations,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45:3 (September 2002), 385-403, on 386-387; Warner M. Bailey, “William Robertson Smith and American Biblical Studies,” *Journal of Presbyterian History* 51:3 (Fall 1973), 285-308.

over the authorship of the Bible.⁵⁶ This earliest effort foreshadowed the tenacious scholarly arguments and irascible tone that marked his long career. His 1863 volume *The Pentateuch Vindicated from the Aspersions of Bishop Colenso* dismissed the infidel attacks as insignificant, explaining that the book's infamy was "due not to any novelty in its arguments, or speciousness in its objections, nor to any special merit in the mode of their presentation, but solely to the fact that a Bishop belonging to one of the leading churches of evangelical Christendom has undertaken to destroy the faith which once he preached."⁵⁷ Green ridiculed the Bishop as mentally unstable and dishonest, his "disordered brain" fixated on "petty, unessential matters."⁵⁸ He rejected especially Colenso's delusion that Christian orthodoxy and piety could be maintained in the wake of such fundamental attacks on the historical truth of the Bible: "Undermine the truth and the divine authority of the Scriptures, and everything is gone. If the Scriptures are not an infallible communication from God, ...then indeed we are reduced to a most miserable plight. Everything is involved in doubt, and uncertainty, and darkness."⁵⁹

Other voices debated the value of Colenso's critical efforts, and American evangelicals revealed their general unpreparedness to consider seriously the scientific interpretation of the Bible's message, insisting instead on the divinely inspired and self-validating view of

⁵⁶ William Henry Green, *The Pentateuch Vindicated from the Aspersions of Bishop Colenso* (New York: John Wiley, 1863), quotation on 21.

⁵⁷ Green, *Pentateuch Vindicated*, quotation on iii-iv.

⁵⁸ Green, *Pentateuch Vindicated*, quotations on 21, 193.

⁵⁹ Green, *Pentateuch Vindicated*, quotation on 194.

Scripture.⁶⁰ Unlike in Britain, few opponents of modern criticism in the United States viewed the Bishop's conclusions as part of the same larger threat as *Essays and Reviews*. However, some recognized the whole Anglican controversy as a potential goad to a strengthened tradition of Bible studies. Canadian-American Methodist minister Charles Henry Fowler predicted,

The English mind was recently moved from its theological lethargy by the issue of the "Essays and Reviews." But a thousand pens were soon astir; and now may we reasonably hope that stronger and more definite views of Biblical doctrine and fact will be eliminated from the literature that has been produced on these assaults against our precious Bible. So of Colenso and his doings. Little harm and much good will come of them.⁶¹

William Robertson Smith: Professional Priest and Professional Scientist

While the Colenso dispute is significant to the American context primarily in how it helped to publicize the struggles of an already anxious Church of England, another Scripture controversy soon followed that provoked American responses to a greater degree, both for and against scientific criticism. The third prominent British development drawing further attention to modern biblical research was the career and heresy trial of Scottish Free Church prodigy William Robertson Smith in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Formally educated and employed in both theology and the natural sciences, Robertson Smith advocated "progressive Biblical Science" as a defense of the doctrine of inspiration from the threat of secularizing rationalism, on the one hand, and anti-intellectual dogma on the other.⁶² His scriptural research promoted the use of

⁶⁰ Bailey, "William Robertson Smith," 286; Reidy, "Higher Criticism in England," 238-418; Josef L. Altholz, *Anatomy of a controversy: the debate over "Essays and Reviews," 1860-1864* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 142-43; Ruth Barton, "'Huxley, Lubbock, and Half a Dozen Others': Professionals and Gentlemen in the Formation of the X Club, 1851-1864," *Isis* 89:3 (September 1998), 410-444, on 434.

⁶¹ Charles Henry Fowler, *Colenso's Fallacies: Another Review of the Bishop of Natal* (Cincinnati: Poe & Hitchcock, 1864), 20-21.

⁶² William Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church: Twelve Lectures On Biblical Criticism* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1881), quotation on v.

internal and external evidences and appeared in both scholarly and popular writings, exposing his methods to a broad readership in Britain and the United States. Heavy-handed efforts to convict Robertson Smith on heresy charges ultimately increased his prominence and popularity, generating widespread sympathy in the Anglophone world for the cause of modern biblical criticism.⁶³

Born in 1846 in Scotland, Robertson Smith visited Germany for the first time as a young man and began to explore some of the more radical biblical criticism taught there, in addition to absorbing the latest German scientific developments. He also developed a close collegial relationship and friendship with German biblical scholar Julius Wellhausen, being “able to agree with [him] in many aspects of biblical criticism while maintaining his own evangelical Christian convictions”; this connection would play an especially significant role in Robertson Smith’s later academic career. By 1870, the young Scot had received his license to preach, was elected Chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Exegesis at the Free Church College in Aberdeen, and was also serving as assistant professor of natural philosophy at Edinburgh University. He had begun publishing on both scientific and religious topics, producing original papers in mathematical and electrical physics and a number of erudite essays in theological society journals, already wrestling with some of the fundamental epistemological questions he would explore further later in his career. Although these early writings revealed his growing approval for Continental

⁶³ Bailey, “William Robertson Smith,” 287-308.

approaches to biblical scholarship, they were of limited impact, for they were directed primarily at other scholars.⁶⁴

Robertson Smith's religious contributions to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1875-1889), on the other hand, provoked considerably more controversy and reached an especially wide non-scholarly audience, particularly in the United States.⁶⁵ Since the young polymath had already gained a strong reputation as a biblical scholar by this time, it is not surprising that *Britannica* editor Thomas Spencer Baynes noticed and invited him to contribute to the *Encyclopaedia* as expert on Old Testament history. The ninth edition of *Britannica* was a critical success, and its editors gave especially rigorous treatment of serious and controversial topics, earning it renown as the "scholar's edition."⁶⁶ The 24 volumes and index required 14 years to complete, from 1875 to 1889. Sales in Great Britain were disappointing, amounting to only 10,000 sets. However, five times that number was purchased in the United States, not even counting the unauthorized "hundreds of thousands of direct, condensed, mutilated, or revised

⁶⁴ John W. Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain: Profiles of F.D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 85; John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, *The Life of William Robertson Smith* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 10-32, 61-78, 83-94, 116ff.; Gillian Mary Bediako, "The Relationship between Primal Religion and Biblical Religion in the Works of William Robertson Smith" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Aberdeen, 1995), 69-70 n.5; Booth, "William Robertson Smith," passim; William Robertson Smith, "Christianity and the Supernatural," and "The Question of Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent," in *Lectures and Essays of William Robertson Smith*, eds. John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 109-136, 163-203.

⁶⁵ Richard Yeo, "Reading Encyclopedias: Science and the Organization of Knowledge in British Dictionaries of Arts and Sciences, 1730-1850," *Isis* 82:1 (March 1991), 24-49, on 28; Harvey Einbinder, *The Myth of the Britannica* (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 38-41.

⁶⁶ Herman Kogan, *The Great EB: The Story of the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 53-56, 62-68, quotation on 62.

reprints issued by large and small American publishers.”⁶⁷ Unlike previous editions, this printing of the *Encyclopaedia* was also thoroughly permeated by an evolutionary worldview. For example, the editors had invited British zoologist Thomas Henry Huxley, the most dogged proponent of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, to contribute several biology articles, including “Evolution,” which one shocked publisher decried as “a malicious, diabolical lie!”⁶⁸

However, no *Britannica* contributor proved more controversial than Robertson Smith, whose articles extended this evolutionary view to religious subjects that had traditionally been taught as works of divine fiat. While he provided many exceptionally thorough articles for the series—his entry “Bible” contained 22,000 words, for example—the entries advocating historical criticism from Germany, reviled by one reader as “that fountain of all poison,” drew the most unwelcome attention.⁶⁹ The first paragraph of “Bible” revealed the core message of his entire article: rather than viewing Scripture as a single, timeless testament, he described it as “a number of independent records, which set before us the gradual development of the religion of revelation.”⁷⁰ In his article “Angel,” he rejected the orthodox arguments of the most conservative German theologians such as Ernst Hengstenberg, the darling of conservative American Calvinists, and concluded instead that the critical view clearly entails that angels are mythical.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Kogan, *The Great EB*, quotation on 64.

⁶⁸ Kogan, *The Great EB*, quotation on 66.

⁶⁹ Alex McCraw, Letter to *The Scotsman*, June 1 1877, cited in J. W. Rogerson, *The Bible and Criticism in Victorian Britain: profiles of F. D. Maurice and William Robertson Smith* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 58.

⁷⁰ William Robertson Smith, “Bible,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* v.3 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 634-648, quotation on 634.

⁷¹ William Robertson Smith, “Angel,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* v.2 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1878), 25-27.

Robertson Smith's articles tended to describe his approach as historical rather than scientific, interpreting the Bible as a document that developed over time to reflect humanity's growing understanding of God, a process that one historian has described thus:

religious development or evolution is shown to follow a natural course as a product of changing circumstances, whether cultural, political or environmental, thus reflecting changes entirely within the range of human experience and understanding. It is a matter of evolving ideas and building religious systems, rather than the product of spiritual encounter.⁷²

This evolutionary characterization was especially fraught, considering the popular debates occurring in the same time over Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and the view indicated the shaking foundations of the last area of scholarly study to be reshaped by the principles of naturalistic evolution. For Robertson Smith, a scientific, evolutionary approach to Bible interpretation represented no threat to the function of Scripture, but rather strengthened it through what he called "believing criticism."⁷³ Cultural anthropologist T. O. Beidelman observes, "Evolution makes sense if one believes, as Smith [sic] did, in a chosen people for whom truths were slowly revealed over a long period of time. Thus Smith saw Jews as gradually evolving from a period of ignorance about God's plan for them through ever higher forms of moral awareness."⁷⁴ However, many other leaders in the Free Church read these conclusions with significant alarm. Another historian has observed, "For the conservative wing of the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, the infiltration of German higher criticism in which Smith was implicated

⁷² Bediako, "Relationship between Primal Religion and Biblical Religion," passim, quotation on 102-103.

⁷³ Black and Chrystal, *Life of William Robertson Smith*, 77; William Robertson Smith, "The Question of Prophecy in the Critical Schools of the Continent," *British Quarterly Review* 51 (April 1, 1870), 313-343, passim.

⁷⁴ T. O. Beidelman, *W. Robertson Smith and the Sociological Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), quotation on 38.

was infinitely more troubling than Darwinian science and constituted the arena in which engagement was urgently required.”⁷⁵

Outraged protests against Robertson Smith’s articles appeared as early as 1876, first from other Scottish clergy, demanding that the public nature of his infidelity be punished. Archibald Charteris, one of the most popular and respected clergy in the Church of Scotland, spoke for many of his colleagues in writing,

This article which we are discussing is objectionable in itself; but our chief objection to it is that it should be sent far and wide over English-speaking countries as an impartial account of the present state of our knowledge of the Bible. We regret that a publication which will be admitted without suspicion into many a religious household, and many a carefully guarded public library, should, upon so all-important a matter as the records of our faith, take a stand—a decided stand—on the wrong side.⁷⁶

The fractious relationship between the Free Church and the Scottish state lengthened and complicated Robertson Smith’s heresy proceedings even more than if he had been tried within the Established Church, providing ample opportunity for sensational and partisan publicity. Determined opponents appealed the case after each lenient judgment, enflamed by the young scholar’s contributions to each successive volume of *Britannica*, until finally the matter was tried publicly at the Free Church General Assembly in 1878. Scottish newspapers were especially eager to fan the flames of discord between the Free Church and the Established Church, and popular opinion developed strongly in favor of Robertson Smith. The Assembly initially cleared

⁷⁵ David N. Livingstone, “Public spectacle and scientific theory: William Robertson Smith and the reading of evolution in Victorian Scotland,” *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 35 (2004), 1-29, quotation on 3.

⁷⁶ [Archibald Hamilton Charteris], “The new Encyclopaedia Britannica on Theology,” *Edinburgh Courant*, April 16, 1876, quoted in Black and Chrystal, *Life of William Robertson Smith*, 188-189.

him of the charge of heresy, but under duress they revisited the accusation and removed him from his professorial chair in May of 1881, after three years of hearings.⁷⁷

As his conviction began to seem more likely, Robertson recognized the importance of sharing the methods and conclusions of scientific “believing criticism” with the laity. Urged by his friends, he prepared a series of popular lectures on biblical interpretation, which he first delivered as “The Old Testament in the Jewish Church” in Glasgow, beginning on January 10, 1881, to a total of about 1200 listeners. A few days later he repeated the lecture in Edinburgh, accompanied by an additional address on Arabia, and the orations were published in book by May. The focus of this first collection was the self-validating integrity of the Old Testament, an approach consistent with the lower criticism of the Bible. After his heresy conviction had been delivered, he developed another series of eight lectures under the title “The Prophets of Israel,” exploring how the anthropological evidence of humanity’s religious evolution illuminated the Old Testament books of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah—an approach more consistent with the higher criticism. This series was released in book form in April 1882, selling impressively and receiving favorable reviews. Although the heterodox conclusions reached in these works provoked hostile responses at home and abroad, Robertson Smith believed to the end of his life that he had neither spoken nor written anything contrary to the spirit of his church’s Westminster Confession of Faith. Nevertheless, the thread of evolutionary thought running throughout his biblical scholarship earned him both widespread fame and notoriety. Over the next seven years,

⁷⁷ Black and Chrystal, *Life of William Robertson Smith*, 96ff., 122ff., 157-159, 188ff.; Einbinder, *Myth of the Britannica*, 41-42; Michael F. Lombardo, “A Voice of Our Own: America and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Controversy, 1911-1936,” *American Catholic Studies* 120:4 (2009), 1-28, on 4-6; Booth, “William Robertson Smith,” *passim*.

Robertson Smith was able to step more freely into the role of co-editor for the remaining volumes of the *Britannica*. He authored more than 200 articles in the *Encyclopaedia* and influenced the writing of many others, including the invitation of other English and Continental religious and biblical scholars to contribute. After 1884, he shifted his energies to the study and teaching of Semitic languages and cultures, and ended his involvement in the further development of scientific biblical criticism.⁷⁸

Outside of Scotland, the greatest impact of Robertson Smith's work was felt in the United States. As in Britain, the popular spread of his writings brought into prominence ideas that would otherwise not have been heard outside the circles of Old Testament specialists. The impressive American sales of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (whether in authorized or bootlegged form), the sensational press coverage of heresy proceedings that soon followed, and the popularly accessible collections of lectures helped to acquaint a broad reading public with the Scotsman's adoption of scientific and historical investigation to strengthen the role of the Bible in modern Protestantism.⁷⁹ In fact, one Presbyterian historian credits Robertson Smith with returning the "tradition of American critical study of the Bible back to life after two decades of dormancy."⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Black and Chrystal, *Life of William Robertson Smith*, 404-421, 451, 453-484, 617-628; Bailey, "William Robertson Smith," 289, 293, 305; Livingstone, "Public spectacle," 3, 22; K. W. Whitelam, "William Robertson Smith and the so-called new histories of Palestine," in *William Robertson Smith: Essays in reassessment*, ed. W. Johnstone (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 180-189, on 181, cited in Livingstone, "Public spectacle," 16.

⁷⁹ Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of the Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1895), 264-265, 277; Francis L. Patton, "Rationalism in the Free Church of Scotland," *Princeton Review* (January 1880), 105-124, on 113; Lombardo, "A Voice of Our Own," 5.

⁸⁰ Bailey, "William Robertson Smith," quotation on 289.

Almost immediately after Robertson Smith's trial had begun *The Independent*, a pugnacious New York Congregationalist newspaper, began providing its large readership with detailed explanations of the proceedings and the significance of the Scotsman's "believing criticism." Known for its support of abolition and women's suffrage, *The Independent* showed a clear sympathy for the beleaguered scholar and his cause.⁸¹ The newspaper described the charges and their weaknesses and provided ample space for Robertson Smith's defense in his own words. A number of other American newspapers also offered coverage of the trial, but none with the thoroughness of *The Independent*, which concluded after the verdict,

Professor William Robertson Smith has by no means closed the question concerning the date and authorship of the Pentateuch; but he has opened it, and that is a good service. It is lawful now and will never again be unlawful among English-speaking Christians to study the Old Testament as other books are studied; to inquire of these sacred writings what they have to say for themselves.⁸²

The sensation of Robertson Smith's lengthy tribunal further polarized opinions of higher criticism in the United States. Scholar Dwayne Cox explains that American Old Testament scholarship may be classified as *non-critical*, *critical*, and *anti-critical*, based on its attitude toward the rigorous analysis of texts, with research before about 1830 being almost entirely non-critical.⁸³ The rise and spread of German critical approaches to the Bible provoked an increasingly alarmed anti-critical response from orthodox scholars. The first American

⁸¹ Bailey, "William Robertson Smith," 290-292.

⁸² *The Independent*, Untitled, (September 6, 1877), 17; "The Scottish Heresy Case" (March 7, 1878), 12; "Triumph of Prof. Smith" (March 21, 1878), 12; "The Free Church of Scotland and Professor Smith" (June 19, 1879), 12; "The Proceedings against Professor Smith" (June 16, 1881), 14; "W. Robertson Smith" (August 18, 1881), 4-5; "Robertson Smith and His Critics" (May 23, 1882), quotation on 5; "Editorial Notes" (April 5, 1894), 12.

⁸³ Dwayne Cox, "William Henry Green: Princeton Theologian," *Hebrew Studies* 19 (1978), 16-25, on 18.

theologian to participate in this backlash to Robertson Smith's *Britannica* articles was Francis L. Patton, later the President of the College of New Jersey, whose essay appeared in the January 1880 issue of the *Princeton Review*. Patton condemned the entry "Bible" as Scripture distorted by the doctrine of evolution, and worried about the repercussions of Robertson Smith's trial: "The final adjudication of the case will influence the churches of Presbyterian order on this side of the sea.... men in this country are beginning to look upon the trial as the exponent of a great anti-confessional drift."⁸⁴ Setting a precedent that was soon followed by other American opponents of the Scotsman, Patton invoked the orthodox conclusions of German theologian Ernst Hengstenberg, who dismissed the higher criticism as reckless anti-supernaturalism. Patton found Robertson Smith's use of literary (lower) criticism acceptable, since it did not precipitate the same unacceptably slippery slope:

If the philosophy of evolution requires men to give up the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, it will require them to repudiate the miraculous facts of Christianity. But if the critical conclusions regarding the Pentateuch are reached only and purely as the result of an application of the laws of literary criticism, there is no logical necessity which will impel one to come to similar conclusions regarding other portions of Scripture.⁸⁵

Even in his denunciation, however, Patton was obligated to give a detailed explanation of Robertson Smith's case and the claims of German biblical scholarship at its heart, further publicizing these heterodox methods. The reach of Patton's article was considerable, as conservatives in Scotland also seized upon it and quoted it abundantly in a pamphlet titled "What is Being Said in America."⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Patton, "Rationalism," 105-114, quotation on 114.

⁸⁵ Patton, "Rationalism," quotation on 114.

⁸⁶ Bailey, "William Robertson Smith," 300-302.

William Henry Green: Scholarly Voice for Traditional Biblical Doctrine

Another especially significant American critique came from a young biblical specialist whom Robertson Smith acknowledged as “the most scholarly by far of my assailants.”⁸⁷ Princeton professor William Henry Green, who had entered the academic debate over scientific biblical criticism in his rejoinder of Bishop Colenso twenty years earlier, had since established himself as the conservative leader of American biblical scholarship. From his influential position as the senior professor at Princeton Seminary, Green exemplified the ambivalence of American evangelical Christianity toward the scientific and historical foundations of modern biblical scholarship and their ascendant authority over supernatural revelation. Thoroughly capable in German and Semitic languages, Green fully understood the debates over biblical authorship and authority taking place on the Continent. He was also not unsympathetic to some of the central tenets in this modern criticism; for example, he thoroughly agreed that the Old Testament reflected its specific time and place, and must be subject to the same critical treatment as other texts.⁸⁸ Green’s most important works focused their reproach instead on scholarship that failed to treat the Bible axiomatically as “a revelation from God.”⁸⁹ Without this doctrinal cornerstone, Green believed that “unbelieving criticism” would lead its readers to false and impious conclusions.⁹⁰ Furthermore, he denounced Robertson Smith’s series of popular lectures for

⁸⁷ William Robertson Smith to Charles A. Briggs. 2 April 1883, Briggs transcripts, VI:2121, cited in Cox, “William Henry Green,” 20-21.

⁸⁸ Cox, “William Henry Green,” 20; Bailey, “William Robertson Smith,” 300-305; Ronald L. Numbers, “‘The Most Important Biblical Discovery of Our Time’: William Henry Green and the Demise of Ussher’s Chronology,” *Church History* 69:2 (June 2000), 257-276, passim; James H. Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary in American Religion and Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 241-245.

⁸⁹ William Henry Green, *Moses and the Prophets* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), quotation on 18.

⁹⁰ Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, 19-24.

exposing American audiences to such falsehoods: “barriers of distance and of language, in which we found our safety from the critical battles that have raged in Germany, are suddenly thrown down and the conflict is at once transported to our own shores.”⁹¹

Green insisted that it was no longer sufficient to appeal to conservative German scholars in combating the threat of higher criticism to the laity: “Now that the critical battle is brought to our own doors, it will not do to wait till defenders of the faith in other lands work out a solution for us. We must have an English and American scholarship that is fitted to grapple with these questions as they arise.”⁹² He recognized that his own exceptional knowledge of German and modern biblical scholarship would not be enough, and he issued an urgent call for his fellow scholars to help him defeat the growing threat from within Protestantism’s own leadership: “There is a demand now, as never before, for high Biblical scholarship, for well-trained exegetes and critics—for men well versed in the critical and speculative attacks made upon the word of God, and who are well prepared to defend it.”⁹³

Although not employed as a man of science, as Robertson Smith had been, Green was well informed and enthusiastic about the value of the natural sciences. Having recently criticized Bishop Colenso’s imposition of arithmetical and naturalist reasoning on the Bible’s narratives, Green reflected in 1865 on the proper relation of science to supernatural revelation for an

⁹¹ Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, quotation on 27.

⁹² Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, quotation on 31-32.

⁹³ Green, *Moses and the Prophets*, quotation on 31.

assembly at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. His address praised the value of the natural sciences as a cornerstone of the educated mind and demonstrated his thorough knowledge of their methods and the latest scientific developments. In addition to his assertion that the Bible was a “revelation from God,” Green invoked the Protestant Congruence as axiomatic, and that science and Christian faith were in fact linked as natural theology, “the direct testimony which the world offers to its glorious author.”⁹⁴ He identified the epistemological deficiencies of science in terms he would continue to use throughout his career, notably in his critique of scientific biblical interpretation. First, despite having their roots in antiquity, he described the scientific disciplines as still striving for maturity and consensus: “the sciences are built up by slow degrees.”⁹⁵ Second, although true knowledge of nature was compatible with revelation, not all human interpretations of it were: “The office of science is not to impose human ideas upon nature, but to uncover those of the great Creator.”⁹⁶ Third, because the allure of scientific knowledge tempted scholars to supplant the established wisdom of Scripture, he cautioned listeners about how they drew conclusions, “not resting satisfied with deductions from partially apprehended facts, nor generalizing too hastily from narrow premises, nor accepting that which at first sight appears plausible until it has been subjected to the most rigorous tests. This caution is characteristic of true science.”⁹⁷ These principles Green returned to repeatedly in his criticism

⁹⁴ William Henry Green, *The Value of Physical Science in the Work of Education* (Easton, PA: Board of Trustees of Lafayette College, 1865), 21-22, 24-25, 27, 30, 31, quotation on 30.

⁹⁵ Green, *Value of Physical Science*, quotation on 21-22.

⁹⁶ Green, *Value of Physical Science*, quotation on 22.

⁹⁷ Green, *Value of Physical Science*, quotation on 24-25.

of Robertson Smith's biblical scholarship. True science, he maintained, could in fact be identified by its unequivocal agreement with the claims of orthodox interpretation of Scripture.⁹⁸

Despite his rising prominence in developing a distinctive Calvinist biblical theology at Princeton, Green instead channeled the rest of his academic career into the battle against modern criticism of the Old Testament, even after Robertson Smith had moved on to studying Semitic languages and cultures. When the theological journal *Presbyterian Review* was established in 1880, its editor wasted no time in arranging to print a series of articles on the controversy raised by Robertson Smith, with Green selected as the opposition leader. This dialogue grew into an ongoing debate, not only among biblical experts from the nation's most significant theological schools, but also in the pages of popular periodicals, such as the *New York Times* and the widely read religious paper the *Independent*.⁹⁹ Even more crucial to the public dissemination of critically informed Bible study was Green's growing role as popularizer in the pages of the newspaper *Sunday School Times*. Founded three decades earlier by the American Sunday School Union to "establish a Sunday-school in every destitute place where it is practicable throughout the Valley of the Mississippi," the *Times* exposed an impressively large readership of educators and families to regular lessons in the serious study of Scripture.¹⁰⁰ Regularly featured were

⁹⁸ Green, *Value of Physical Science*, 25.

⁹⁹ Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 244-246; Cox, "William Henry Green," 20; Numbers, "Most Important Biblical Discovery," 267 n18; Peter J. Wallace, "The Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology: The Development of Old Testament Theology at Old Princeton, 1812-1932," *Westminster Theological Journal* 59 (1997), 41-69; Donald McKim, *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 295; William Henry Green, "Critical Notes," *Sunday School Times*, 25 articles (January 1-June 18, 1887), passim.

¹⁰⁰ Edwin Wilbur Rice, *The Sunday-School Movement, 1780-1917, and the American Sunday-School Union, 1817-1917* (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), quotation on 196; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1865-1885* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1938), 66-67.

German Lutheran theologian Franz Delitzsch, Oxford Hebrew scholar Samuel Driver, and Green, whom the editor praised repeatedly as “the Hengstenberg of America” and one of “the foremost biblical scholars on either side of the Atlantic.”¹⁰¹ The *Times* prefaced its 1887 series of scholarly columns with an even-handed explanation for their increased coverage of the latest developments in biblical criticism:

With the growth of intelligent Bible study among the people there came to be a necessity of critical comments for the people.... Not merely clergymen, but very many lay teachers—more than ministers generally suppose—are cognizant of the discussions which have been going on concerning the supposed conflict between Genesis and science, and concerning the composition and authorship of the first six books in the sacred canon.... Intelligent Bible students have a right to be informed on these points by those who are themselves positive in their views of inspiration and revelation, instead of waiting to learn them from those who would make such opinions a means of overthrowing the faith of the Bible student.¹⁰²

The twenty-four lessons offered by Green over the next six months of the *Sunday School Times* support the claim by Presbyterian historian Warner Bailey that the scholar’s receptivity toward modern criticism had shifted since his earlier engagements with Robertson Smith.¹⁰³ When Green had first reviewed the Scotsman’s *Old Testament in the Jewish Church* in 1882, he was dismissive of the modern scholarship in general, and in particular of Robertson Smith’s use of internal evidence to refute the doctrine of Mosaic authorship. However, a year later he also reviewed *Prophets of Israel*, which invoked *external* evidences from history and archaeology to interpret the Bible as a chronicle of humanity’s evolving religious consciousness, rather than a

¹⁰¹ Henry Clay Trumbull, editorial comments, *Sunday School Times*, quotations on 29:25 (June 18, 1887), 385 and 29:46 (November 12, 1887), 721.

¹⁰² Henry Clay Trumbull, “Biblical Criticism and Biblical Critics,” *Sunday School Times* 29:3 (January 15, 1887), 33-35, quotations on 33, 34.

¹⁰³ Bailey, “William Robertson Smith,” 305-307.

divine revelation to serve for all time. In light of this more radical critical treatment, Green found Robertson Smith's earlier literary criticism less objectionable, and in a second review of *Old Testament in the Jewish Church* he grudgingly praised the volume for its "devout spirit" and skillful explanations of critical method for general audiences.¹⁰⁴ This qualified respect persisted later, in Green's *Sunday School Times* lessons, where he explained fairly and in detail the scholarly arguments against the traditional views of the Old Testament.¹⁰⁵ The response to Green's columns was so positive that he was invited to continue in 1888, and the editor cheekily explained away any orthodox sensibilities that might be ruffled: "Probably more persons than he would suppose, for example, have been sadly disturbed by his suggestions. Yet where Dr. Green has disturbed or grieved one reader by such a course, he has helped and cheered very many more by that same wise course. And those whom he has thus disturbed needed disturbing in just that way."¹⁰⁶ Green acknowledged that even his most able and devout colleagues had eventually been won over by the higher criticism, although he would not accept their assurances that the sacred texts could retain their supernatural and divinely inspired character under such treatment. Green was not exaggerating in his reflections that he had become one of the last Bible scholars defending the orthodox interpretation of the Pentateuch; even in his eventual willingness to adopt certain methods of modern criticism, it was clear that other serious scholars were leaving him

¹⁰⁴ William Henry Green, *Moses and the Prophets* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883), 255-353, quotation on 256.

¹⁰⁵ Numbers, "Most Important Biblical Discovery," 267-269; Moorhead, *Princeton Seminary*, 246; Wallace, "Foundations of Reformed Biblical Theology," 41-69, on 43-44 and 51-60; Green, "Critical Notes," passim; William Henry Green, "Pentateuch Criticism," *Sunday School Times* 29:25 (June 18, 1887), 387-388; William Henry Green, "Prof. W. Robertson Smith on the Pentateuch," *Presbyterian Review* 3 (1882), 108-56; William Henry Green, "Dr. W. Robertson Smith on The Prophets of Israel," *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 32 (1883), 201-60; William Henry Green, *Professor Robertson Smith on the Pentateuch* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1882), passim.

¹⁰⁶ Trumbull, "Biblical Criticism," quotation on 34.

behind in their embrace of the historical and scientific interpretation of Scripture. By 1890, many of his evangelical colleagues had been convinced by the swell of support for higher criticism, and one Scottish theological journal relayed the jibe about Green that there was now “but one Old Testament scholar who rejects the result of criticism.”¹⁰⁷ When Green published his last major works in 1895, it was clear that a vanishingly small number of colleagues still agreed with his resistance to modern biblical interpretation.¹⁰⁸

Conclusion: The Widespread Erosion of the Bible’s Singular Status

Scientific biblical interpretation in the United States was particularly indebted to a number of British controversies over the reassessment of the doctrine of inspiration. The claim of a special, divine origin for the Bible had entrenched in Protestantism a principle of exceptionalism, but these debates challenged the claims that Scripture and its interpreters merited exemption from the standards applied to other sources of knowledge. Inspired by the boldness of German theologians, a number of Anglican leaders demonstrated the value of literary, historical, and scientific criticism in addressing difficult aspects of the biblical cosmology. The angry reaction and resulting debates revealed the incoherence of the doctrine of inspiration and the insupportable expectation that those most knowledgeable about Scripture be expected to preserve, rather than correct and extend, its current understanding.

¹⁰⁷ “At the Literary Table: The Books of the Month,” *The Expository Times* 7 (1896), 226-230, quotation on 227; Dunlop Moore, “Dr. W. H. Green of Princeton,” *The Expository Times* 10 (1898-1899), 426-429, quotation on 426.

¹⁰⁸ Numbers, “Most Important Biblical Discovery,” 267-269.

While the publication of *Essays and Reviews* and the research of Bishop Colenso produced relatively modest American responses outside of Anglican circles, they did serve to familiarize a large popular readership with the message to “interpret the Scripture like any other book.” The specially protected status of Scripture was eroding and losing its immunity to challenging external evidences, such as historical knowledge and observed facts from nature. By the late 1870s, when William Robertson Smith’s *Encyclopaedia Britannica* entries reached American readers, the non-scholarly public had already been exposed to alternatives to the traditional doctrine of inspiration and had begun to discuss the possibilities of the Bible as a human collaboration with all of the fallibility of human perception. The sensationalism and protracted length of the Scotsman’s heresy trial increased both his notoriety and the visibility of his ideas. Robertson Smith’s published lecture series further exposed non-scholarly readers to the rationale and the methods of both the lower criticism and the higher criticism of the Bible. Despite his reassurances of the compatibility of Christian faith and modern interpretation, critics insisted that, if interpretation was to be legitimately scientific, it must not undermine the canonical principles of divine inspiration or self-authentication. Robertson Smith’s opponents feared that the work he was popularizing constituted an attack at the very heart of Christianity. Most prominent among these adversaries was Princeton scholar William Henry Green, who devoted his otherwise promising academic career to this controversy, even after his orthodox colleagues had relented.

The most prominent and lasting polarization over these three controversies occurred, not between proponents and opponents of science, or between biblical Christians and secularists, but between those who could accept a biblical narrative reinterpreted to reflect scientific knowledge

and those who could not. This division continued to grow, as seen in the popular promotion of modern biblical scholarship, addressed in Chapter Five, and in the conservative evangelical backlash that included the movement of Christian Fundamentalism, covered in Chapter Six.

Chapter Four

Associations of Higher Biblical Criticism with Evolutionary Thought

*Biblical criticism has long been affected by the scientific method, and is now to be controlled by it... It concedes that the Scriptures must be subjected to the tests of reason, and this concession is due entirely to the modern scientific movement, which demands higher standards of proof.*¹

— Edward L. Youmans

Introduction

The second half of the nineteenth century in the United States was rife with intellectual, social, and cultural developments that challenged the standing order and the Bible's place in it. It is not intuitively obvious why, among all these changes, modern forms of biblical scholarship became associated with evolutionary thought, or why evolutionism eventually became the central point of intellectual contention among American Protestants. In following claims of evolutionary theory's impact, both constructive and destructive, on the already trembling edifice of biblical scholarship, I will show how this association contributed to a significant rearrangement of the nation's religious landscape in the first third of the twentieth century.

The range of beliefs and commitments within Protestantism provide a rich but potentially overwhelming object of study. This chapter will address in particular how, among the breadth of responses to modern intellectual and social developments, particular denominations selected higher biblical criticism and modern scientific knowledge as necessary to maintaining the Bible as the cornerstone of American society and faith, while other Protestant movements considered these external sources of authority threatening to the cosmology they upheld. I begin with a

¹ Edward L. Youmans, "The Science of Biblical Criticism," *The Popular Science Monthly* 19 (July 1881), 408-409, quotation on 408.

survey of the Victorian “crisis of faith” attributed to the disruptive emergence of evolutionary thought, and then focus specifically on the biblical claims potentially challenged by this developmental worldview. Central to the perception that Protestant Christianity enjoyed a relatively stable relationship with science at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and all but rent asunder by the century’s end, is a doctrine that I name the Protestant Congruence. This claim states that, since both the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture were authored by the same rational and benevolent Creator, their messages must be compatible. As this chapter will demonstrate, this Congruence inspired deep trust among both Protestant academics and laypeople, but revealed itself in the light of modern scholarship to be both perfunctory and insecure. Lastly, I explore the causes, dynamics, and repercussions of communicating this Congruence and its collapse to non-scholarly audiences, a development profoundly influential to the schism occurring within American Protestantism and the culture of the United States as a whole.²

University of California historian Henry May has provided a particularly useful lens through which we can better make sense of the diverging trajectories of late nineteenth-century Protestant thought. Evaluating the complex intellectual and cultural shifts in the United States between the eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, May noted how America had navigated this transition differently than Europe. He identified several eighteenth-century developments that had become entrenched socially in the United States, in forms both innocuous and durable:

- religious revivalism and religious opposition to authority;
- an association of economic expansion and prosperity with divine Providence;
- a powerful curiosity about egalitarianism and opposition to elitism;

² Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 57-78.

- a belief in the progress of science as a pillar of future happiness; and
- an attraction to German literature and thought, beginning in the 1830s, especially to New England intellectuals such as Theodore Parker and his contemporaries, who adapted them to American Protestant culture.³

May credited varying levels of commitment to these developments for the production of four divergent Enlightenment traditions, which help us understand why and how networks differed in their responses to the biblically challenging ideas of higher criticism and evolutionism.⁴

May's Enlightenment schema helps to illuminate how different religious networks in the United States differently apportioned their commitments to scientific knowledge and biblical knowledge. The modernist developments arising after the Civil War highlighted and reinforced long-standing positions about the nature of knowledge, and these various commitments were expressed in discernible patterns. For example, while Unitarian scholars exercised considerable stimulus of New England's intellectual activity in the early nineteenth century, their importance dwindled considerably as European settlement of the American continent moved westward. In the postbellum United States, the most influential and interesting struggles over modernist developments in relation to the Bible took place within the networks constituting evangelical Protestantism, most notably the Presbyterians, the Baptists, and the many believers unaffiliated with any denomination. The Presbyterians in particular had already demonstrated mid-century

³ Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xi-101.

⁴ Henry F. May, *The Divided Heart: Essays on Protestantism and the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 179-196; Herbert Hovenkamp, *Science and Religion in America, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 57-78.

that splitting over a doctrinal disagreement was an option, so the time was ripe for disgruntled evangelicals to transfer their loyalty to emergent networks and movements.⁵

Also particularly useful to this chapter are the summaries of Protestant accommodations written by historians Claude Welch, Mark Noll, and Jon Roberts. These three scholars concur that a strong commitment to the *methods* of the modernizing sciences tended to produce progressive positions, in which believers accepted modifications to the biblical narratives to accommodate scientific knowledge. On the other hand, an insistence on traditional *conclusions* over method generally correlated with conservative positions, in which knowledge about the natural world was interpreted and embraced selectively to bolster the Bible's authority. A third range of responses, loosely interpreted by these historians as a middle ground, involved a general affirmation of the Protestant Congruence that science and religion were innately compatible, although these believers also vacillated about more specific scientific challenges to scriptural claims.⁶

This chapter will chronicle how the Protestant Congruence revealed itself after the Civil War to be a more complicated epistemological commitment than it had appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The romanticized form of this agreement, in which the Bible and

⁵ May, *The Enlightenment in America*, xi-xix, 3-101, 337-338; May, *The Divided Heart*, 149-194; Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma*, 1-3, 32-39.

⁶ Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Volume II, 1870-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994); Jon H. Roberts, "Religious Reactions to Darwin," *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, ed. Peter Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 80-102; May, *The Enlightenment in America*, xi-101.

science unquestioningly agreed, was threatened particularly by the growing acceptance that the natural order was not static. Differing religious responses to this disruption of the Congruence correlated with how Protestant movements associated higher biblical criticism and evolutionary thought, as a hopeful message or as a dire threat to their faith. I will show that these changes were prompted not only by the influence of external forces such as evolutionary thought, but also by developments within Protestantism, extending from innovations in the doctrine of inspiration, as demonstrated in Chapter Three. This chapter also recounts how widely these disruptive methods and conclusions spread from their scholarly origins in universities and theological seminaries, aided by the popular press, lecture series, and progressive preachers, to a curious and enthusiastic audience of laypeople. Lastly, I will demonstrate how all of these developments contributed to a movement of Protestants, underrepresented in the historical literature, unwilling to relinquish their commitment to either the Bible or scientific methods.

Evolutionary Thought and the Victorian Crisis of Faith

Most American Protestants in the nineteenth century would have readily agreed that biblical knowledge and scientific knowledge were innately compatible. This concurrence, which this dissertation is calling the Protestant Congruence, provided a foundation for a powerful and productive worldview, in which common sense and simple observation entailed the argument for design at the heart of natural theology. Evangelicals in particular expressed deep commitment to the principle that science and the Bible, properly understood, would not contradict one another. Nature, they assumed, was “ordered, intelligible, and meaningful,” George Marsden explains; “They saw in nature qualities that it would be likely to have only if it were created by a benevolent Creator and Governor, interested in the welfare of his creatures. He would ensure that

if they used their faculties responsibly, they would gain substantial knowledge about him and about the rest of creation.”¹⁷ That is, nature did not provide knowledge only about the material world, but also about the world of morality, by manifesting God’s rewards and punishments for our particular behaviors. Even though surprising and sometimes challenging scientific discoveries arose, “yet would the Christian welcome joyfully, and appropriate each successive revelation,” rhapsodized the Reverend L. W. Green, President of Hampden Sidney College in Virginia.¹⁸ However, remembering the constant threat of skepticism and secularism, evangelicals were adamant that even faithful observations of the natural world were not sufficient – additional revelation in the form of the Bible was required for the fullest and most trustworthy knowledge.¹⁹

A complex constellation of intellectual and social developments occurred in the late nineteenth century that disrupted this influential Congruence underlying much of American Protestantism, and particularly evangelicalism. Historian Mark Noll identifies several interrelated elements that contributed to this “intellectual revolution”: a new generation of scholars, new influences from Europe, new structures and dynamics in the American economy, new social roles and norms, and new forms of professionalization.²⁰ Central to this disruption

¹⁷ George Marsden, “The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219-264, quotation on 242.

¹⁸ L. W. Green, “The Harmony of Revelation and Natural Science, With Especial Reference to Geology,” in *Lectures on the Evidences of Christianity* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1854), 458-520, quotation on 464, cited in Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 233-234.

¹⁹ Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 20, 42; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100-107, passim.

²⁰ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100ff, quotation on 100.

were the two movements at the heart of this dissertation, higher biblical criticism and evolutionary thought, which cast serious doubt on purportedly established truths, particularly biblical claims. Evangelical Protestants disagreed over how best to respond to these modern developments, as the values related to their core beliefs faced new challenges. They feared that long-trusted authorities, such as the Bible, were being replaced with new, less substantiated ones. Naturalistic and allegedly scientific alternative explanations emerged for the formation of the universe, the appearance of life, and the intellectual and moral capacity of humans. Evolutionists were beginning to view all societies, histories, writings, and worldviews, including religious teachings, as naturally subject to change over time. Educated Americans increasingly disparaged the specially protected status of Christian doctrine and the Bible, and they viewed fabulous claims such as the biblical miracles with growing apprehension. Evangelicals experienced particularly serious divisions over how extensively they could reinterpret Scripture to accommodate these new developments.²¹

The Biblical Repercussions of Evolutionary Thought

Particularly challenging among the innovations in natural knowledge was a more rigorous engagement with new theories of organic evolution, most famously Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection. His depiction of evolution in *Origin of Species* and *Descent of Man* as occurring by natural law alone, without divine plan or purpose, proved too bleakly pessimistic

²¹ Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 121-179; Marsden, "Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," 219, 222-224, 233; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 42; James Turner, *Religion Enters the Academy: The Origins of the Scholarly Study of Religion in America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 32-55; James Ward Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," in *The Shaping of American Religion*, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), passim.

for many readers.²² George Marsden observed, “Darwinism was especially threatening to the entire evangelical edifice because it boldly removed the presumed intelligent design of nature and hence the benevolent Designer.”²³ However, this non-theistic theory was not the only evolutionary explanation in circulation in the mid- and late nineteenth century. Ferenc Szasz noted, “The version of evolution absorbed by most Americans always had God’s design safely locked within it.”²⁴ It was another interpretation of development as God’s prescient design of nature, popularized not only but especially by English intellectual Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), that more successfully won over non-scholarly audiences in the United States, at least in the short term. Especially instrumental in this dissemination of religiously palatable evolution was the New York publisher and popularizer of science Edward Youmans (1821-1887), whose periodical *Popular Science Monthly* regularly featured Spencer and his evolutionary thought. First encountering Spencer’s philosophy from the 1856 work *Principles of Psychology*, Youmans found his own inchoate beliefs about development confirmed and clarified, including the idea of an unfathomable, ultimate deity responsible for the design of lawful nature. The American editor eagerly consumed Spencer’s work and used his own publishing platform to promote the writings and support the financial interests of the English scholar. Youmans kept Spencer informed about the spread of his evolutionary ideas, arranging with colleagues in the United States to review his

²² Hugh Elliot, *Herbert Spencer* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1917), 27, passim; Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 37; John Fiske, *Edward Livingstone Youmans: Interpreter of Science for the People* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1894), 149, 161-166, 168, 382; Herbert Spencer, *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904), 2:53-54, 83, 509ff; Edward L. Youmans to Herbert Spencer (November 4, 1863), in Fiske, *Youmans*, 154.

²³ Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” quotation on 243.

²⁴ Ferenc Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 3-7, quotation on 3.

works and sending him copies of the articles. Although the readers of *Popular Science Monthly* were introduced in practically every issue to evolution in various forms, including biological, social, and cosmic development, the editor was convinced that the most comprehensive depiction of the evolving natural order was the faithful version articulated by his idol Spencer. Youmans acknowledged that Darwin had “contributed immensely toward the extension and establishment of a theory of organic development,” but noted that he had never even tried to work out the wider repercussions of evolution as “a general principle of nature,” as Spencer had.²⁵

At this point it is necessary to address a claim in the scholarly literature that the impact of Spencer’s evolutionism in the United States was negligible. Despite the considerable visibility of Spencer’s variety of evolutionary thought among American readers, historian Jon Roberts dismisses the possibility that this particular interpretation exerted significant influence over their religious belief. He disputed the claim that “Protestant thinkers sought to show that their theology could be reconciled with Spencerianism.” Citing James Moore’s *Post-Darwinian Controversies* and Richard Hofstadter’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, Roberts concluded, “Whether or not such reconciliation was theoretically possible, I see little evidence... to suggest that Protestant intellectuals were willing to countenance Spencer’s view of religion.”²⁶ As ably as his *Darwinism and the Divine in America* addresses the shifts in American Protestantism in response to developments in natural science, Roberts deliberately forgoes

²⁵ Edward L. Youmans, “Spencer and the Doctrine of Evolution,” *Popular Science Monthly* 6 (November 1874), quotation on 45; William E. Leverette, “Science and Values: A Study of Edward L. Youmans’ *Popular Science Monthly*, 1872-1887” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1963) 21-48, 61-125.

²⁶ Jon H. Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America: Protestant Intellectuals and Organic Evolution, 1859-1900* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 76, 290n21, quotations on 274n34.

concerns internal to religion, such as changes in the doctrine of inspiration and the loss of authority experienced by Protestants in higher education.²⁷ This choice appears to lead him to depict the unstable and porous category of Protestant biblical belief as relatively fixed and clear-cut. Believers who insisted on a timeless, static faith did not admit Spencer's evolutionism, while those willing to accommodate new knowledge expressed enthusiasm about the providential Creator working through an ever-transforming natural order. For example, when the annual Church Congress of the Protestant Episcopal Church included a panel of several speakers on "The Argument from Design as Affected by the Theory of Evolution," their copious mentions of Spencer's version of evolutionary theory were double in number that of Darwin's more agnostic account.²⁸ It was an expression of evolutionary thought compatible with Christianity that engaged people's attention, rather than one that neglected God's involvement altogether.

Hofstadter's aforementioned volume clarifies the nature of this reception:

To determined representatives of religious orthodoxy, Spencer's compromise was no more acceptable than that of [Asa] Gray or [Joseph] Le Conte, and denunciations of his philosophy appeared frequently in the theological journals of the 1860s. Religious leaders who were willing to dally with liberalism, however, saw much in Spencer to praise. While thinkers like [James] McCosh found the Unknowable too vague and uncomfortable for faith and worship, some could identify it with God.²⁹

That is, Protestants unwilling to countenance any changes to the Bible's interpretation or authority viewed Spencer's contribution more negatively than those generally favorable to new understandings of Scripture and natural knowledge. Although this distinction is practically a

²⁷ Frederick Gregory, review of *Darwinism and the Divine in America* by Jon H. Roberts, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 27:2 (April 1991), 185-186.

²⁸ Protestant Episcopal Church, *Papers, Addresses, and Discussions at the Sixteenth Church Congress in the United States* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1894), 172-202.

²⁹ Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 37-38; Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 99, 103-104.

tautology, it requires that we pay adequate attention to the internal developments within Protestant belief. Most importantly, it avoids erasing the faithful enthusiasts of science who responded to evolutionary thought not by disposing of their religious commitments, but by articulating new ways to be biblical.

Spencer's pious version of evolutionary theory captured the attention of many American Protestants willing to admit new views of biblical knowledge. While his philosophy had not won him significant favor in England, in the United States the authorized sales alone of his works totaled 370,000 copies by the turn of the century, a nearly unprecedented success for philosophical writings.³⁰ Notwithstanding Roberts's indifference toward Spencer's popularizers, John Fiske and Henry Ward Beecher in particular commanded an "enormous following," in James Moore's assessment.³¹ It is less obvious how many American Protestants were actually converted by the Englishman's provocative version of evolution. For some, the expansiveness of Christian faith could accommodate a developing universe, as long as the divine Creator explicitly remained its author. The Massachusetts pastor, historian, and politician Daniel Dorchester, for example, noted that Fiske himself had declared materialistic philosophy dead and that "the doctrine of evolution really leaves all ultimate questions as much open for discussion as they ever were." Dorchester concluded approvingly that the growing recognition of the God of

³⁰ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism in American Thought*, 34-35.

³¹ Moore, *Post-Darwinian Controversies*, 167-168, quotation on 168.

scientific theism was a reversal of the alarming trend of “blank atheism and the atheistic theory of chance current a century ago.”³²

The Flimsy Foundation of the Protestant Congruence

The corrosive power of higher biblical criticism and evolutionary thought first showed signs of splitting Protestantism within the circles of higher education, disrupting the aforementioned Congruence buttressing the Bible’s origin and authority.³³ Theodore Bozeman observes, “The tradition of doxological science as developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represented a rickety compromise between two contrary views of the natural world,” the two views being the unembellished revelations of scientific inquiry and the existential reassurance of the biblical narrative.³⁴ Princeton philosopher James Ward Smith described the Protestant accommodation of science as a superficial embrace of the products of natural inquiry without also engaging with the methods that made those results possible:

It has long been recognized that the open-armed reception of Newtonian science by the Puritan was an acceptance of the corpus only, and in no way involved serious concession to the methodological spirit of science.... Thus at the very outset of our history a religious philosophy in vogue made the mistake of adjusting to science only in the superficial sense.... Accommodation is “real” only to the extent that it rests upon a painstaking understanding of the method of science and upon taking seriously the success of that method as a way of understanding the nature of things.... Perhaps for this very

³² Daniel Dorchester, *Christianity in the United States: From the First Settlement down to the Present Time* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1889), 653-658, quotations on 653, 654; John Fiske, “The True Lesson of Protestantism,” *North American Review* 134 (1882), 259-271, on 267.

³³ John C. Greene, *The Death of Adam: Evolution and Its Impact on Western Thought* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1959), 23, cited in Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 88-89.

³⁴ Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science: The Baconian Ideal and Antebellum American Religious Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 86-96, quotation on 88.

reason the science they accepted ate away at the inside of their system and eventually caused trouble.³⁵

Smith's observation is central to the contrast this dissertation identifies in Chapters Five and Six between the diverging attitudes toward the role of science in interpreting the Bible.

Additionally, Protestants had generally reached their Congruence by selectively invoking observations from nature as evidence confirming the Bible's narratives, while ignoring the additional evidence that this natural order was not static. George Marsden noted that Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid and his followers "took it for granted that the universe was packed with fixed laws placed there by intelligent design." Thus, conventional Protestant thinkers were quite unprepared for the growing reception of evolutionary thought:

Rather than the prestige of modern science lending support to Christianity, the supposedly neutral scientific methodology turned its forces directly against Christian thought. Out of nowhere, it must have seemed, came an unprecedented scientific assault.... Biblical criticism turned the fire power of such scientific-historical explanation point-blank on the origins of Hebrew religion and the Bible itself.... rather than supporting the old argument from design, nineteenth-century science suddenly produced a series of alternative explanations for the apparent order and purpose in reality."³⁶

Not surprisingly, the American locus where these tensions first became noticeable was in universities and theological seminaries, where general advances in learning were already effecting a widespread disruption in the Protestant domination of higher education. The traditional view characterized by religious historian Theodore Bozeman as "doxological science" – the serious study of nature as a consciously worshipful activity – was yielding in the academy to a less devotional approach to natural knowledge, and the previously explicit Christian

³⁵ James Ward Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," 402-443, quotation on 413-414.

³⁶ Marsden, "Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," quotations on 223-224, 228.

framework succumbing to a deliberately more secular one.³⁷ As Mark Noll describes, “Views of science were changing from static and mechanistic to developmental and organic, attitudes toward academic work from teleological and doxological to progressive and functional, perspectives on religion from particularistic and theistic to universalistic and agnostic.”³⁸ In this troubled context the spread of lower biblical criticism (the comparative study of manuscript evidence for the original words of the Old and New Testaments) and, later, higher criticism (the historical analysis of the Bible as any other book to determine its authorship and composition) posed a serious and growing threat to conventional assumptions about the relative authority of Scripture and science.³⁹

The Transit of Challenging Ideas to Non-Scholarly Audiences

Further unsettling Protestants’ attempts to embrace both biblical Christianity and scientific facts was the postbellum spread of evolutionary thought to non-scholarly audiences. The popular communication of a developmental view of nature, such as those writings disseminated through Edward Youmans’ *Popular Science Monthly*, helped to introduce ordinary Americans to the prospect that Christian belief could accommodate the naturalistic mechanism of evolution. The work of Herbert Spencer and, in the United States, “the American Spencer,” philosopher John

³⁷ Bozeman, *Protestants in an Age of Science*, 71-72.

³⁸ Noll, *Scandal*, 100-102, quotation on 100.

³⁹ Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 373; Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, 81, 99-100, 241ff.; James P. Wind, *The Bible and the University: The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 49-103; Grant Wacker, “The Holy Spirit and the Spirit of the Age in American Protestantism, 1880-1910,” *The Journal of American History* 72:1 (June 1985), 45-62; Grant Wacker, “The Demise of Biblical Civilization,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 121-138.

Fiske, promoted an impersonal concept of God behind the order of lawful nature and provoked “an enormous volume of discussion within the American Protestant intellectual community.”⁴⁰ As with scholars and religious leaders, it was a religiously compatible expression of evolutionary thought that engaged the attention of lay Protestants, rather than a theory that neglected God’s involvement altogether.⁴¹

Not surprisingly, Protestants occupied a variety of positions about how successfully a biblically based faith could accommodate evolutionary thought, even a version that posited a vague, impersonal Creator responsible for its lawful design. George Marsden notes, “Battle lines were seldom neatly drawn between secular humanists who revered science and history and Bible-believing evangelicals who did not. Rather, a whole spectrum of middle positions attempted to reconcile Christian faith with modern intellectual trends.”⁴² Protestants who insisted on their commitment to both the Bible and science in the face of these modernist challenges expressed a broad continuum of responses. Historians of American religion Claude Welch, Mark Noll, and Jon Roberts each identify a conservative pole and a progressive pole to this range, as well as a large, ambivalent middle, many of whom, it turned out, could be swayed to one side or the other by a powerful argument. It is important that today’s readers not conflate these emerging categories of religious liberals and religious conservatives with political liberalism and

⁴⁰ Roberts, *Darwinism and the Divine in America*, quotations on 76.

⁴¹ Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism*, 37-38; Herbert Spencer, *First Principles* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1900), 99, 103-4; Protestant Episcopal Church, *Papers, Addresses, and Discussions at the Sixteenth Church Congress in the United States* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1894), 172-202.

⁴² Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” quotation on 222.

conservatism, as this late twentieth-century correlation misrepresents the values and worldviews of these earlier actors.⁴³

The first class of Protestants identified by Welch, Noll, and Roberts might be described as *progressives* or *theological modernists*. They distinguished themselves by, among other things, their enthusiasm for evolutionary thought and the prospect of rendering Christian faith scientifically admissible and more relevant to life in the modern world. They did not embrace science because they wanted to exchange their biblical beliefs for a naturalistic worldview, but because the Protestant Congruence naturally led them to commit to the methods of science, which in turn pointed them to new and challenging conclusions. Oxford historian Cyril Emmet reflected in 1922 on a similar dynamic in England, “Any given Modernist may or may not believe in the Virgin Birth, or the empty tomb, or the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The essence of modernism lies not in its conclusions, but in the way they are reached and the temper in which they are held.”⁴⁴ These methods included the use of hypotheses in exploring potential theories, the extension of natural law to all areas of study, and the acceptance that all of existence was subject to evolution. The progressive Christians occupying this position so respected the intellectual and cultural authority of the modernizing sciences, and so valued the prospect of making Christianity germane to the changing world, that they were willing to modify

⁴³ Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Volume II, 1870-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 198-211; John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 229-231, passim; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100-107; Jon H. Roberts, “Religious Reactions to Darwin,” in Harrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, 80-102.

⁴⁴ C. W. (Cyril William) Emmet, “The Modernist Movement in the Church of England,” *The Journal of Religion* 2:6 (November 1922), 561-576, quotation on 562-563.

their religious beliefs to accommodate these secular intellectual developments. The consequence for enthusiasts of modernist thought was that the independent authority of the Bible all but disappeared from their worldview; now, even religious thought was appraised through the filter of a scientific cosmology.⁴⁵ The dissemination and reception of this view will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

If historian Kathryn Lofton's characterization of progressive Protestants was an emphasis on "means over ends, method over consequence," in many ways the converse was true for those Protestants unwilling to modify their biblical interpretation to accommodate new scientific knowledge.⁴⁶ Although it has become conventional to describe the second class of responses to modernist thought as *conservative*, perhaps more appropriate would be *reactionary*, as these newly militant and literalistic positions bore little resemblance to any Protestantism of the past. As religious historian Martin Marty observes, "The countermodern reaction at the turn of the century in the field of Protestant evangelism and soul-winning was so complete that latter-day readers may have to be reminded: what later connoted 'The Old Time Religion' had, in earlier

⁴⁵ Claude Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century: Volume II, 1870-1914* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 198-211; John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity Interpreted through Its Development* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), 229-231, *passim*; Brendan M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11-13; Kathryn Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists: Process in American Protestantism," *Church History* 75:2 (June 2006), 374-402, on 379-80; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100-107; Jon H. Roberts, "Religious Reactions to Darwin," in Harrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, 80-102.

⁴⁶ Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 198-211; Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 13; Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists," 374-402; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 42; Roberts, "Religious Reactions to Darwin," in Harrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, 80-102.

eras, been seen variously as New Light, New Side, New School, or New Measures.”⁴⁷ At stake for this group of Christians were the specific doctrines they found threatened by modernist methods and conclusions, including the miraculous creation of species, and particularly the special origin of humans. Like their progressive opponents, these biblical purists also wished to remain relevant to the modern world, but were not generally willing to concede their traditional beliefs. James Ward Smith reflected on the pervasiveness of this selective acquiescence to the scientific worldview: “One may accommodate [a given body of data, laws, and interpretations] of science and remain impervious to its method, and this is true whether the corpus in question is that of pure or of applied science. The housewife may accept and accommodate her dishwasher and her television set without the slightest understanding of the spirit of invention which produced them.”⁴⁸ These religious anti-modernists viewed evolutionism as incompatible with the orthodox Protestant understanding of the Bible, and therefore intellectually inadmissible, while insisting that their worldview was nevertheless fully scientific. Noll raises an additional concern that aided Protestant demagogues in demonizing their opponents: the progressive deference to specialist scientific expertise contained elitist overtones, and this appearance of superiority provided populist leaders an easy rhetorical target in the later cultural battles over the proper understanding of the Bible.⁴⁹ The fundamentalist campaigns that arose from this network of biblical traditionalists will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter Six.

⁴⁷ Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume 1: The Irony of It All, 1893-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 208-247, quotation on 209.

⁴⁸ Smith, “Religion and Science in American Philosophy,” 402-442, quotation on 409.

⁴⁹ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100-107.

The third class of Protestant responses to evolutionism and modern scriptural criticism is more difficult to characterize, but they typically shared a willingness to make only minimal modifications to their views of the Bible as part of the general compatibility between science and religion. Evangelical Protestants in particular valued the principle that the Book of and the Book of Nature were fully compatible, but most also felt anxiety that emerging scientific methods and claims seemed to contradict their long-held assumptions about what constituted legitimate biblical knowledge. One helpful contribution of the lower biblical criticism was to popularize the insight that God had chosen the original language of Scripture to best reach its unlettered audiences. Thus, believers could trust that the proper interpretation of core Christian teachings would also communicate with modern humans on their own terms, consistent with the facts of modern science and even with the possibility of an evolutionary creation.⁵⁰ George Marsden notes that, while this mediating position appealed to many laypeople who valued the compatibility of their faith with science, this purported middle ground survived in academic form almost entirely in theological schools; as noted above, the secular academy increasingly disallowed biblical claims that placed limits on the assertions of natural knowledge.⁵¹

A considerable number of observant Protestants viewed scientific biblical criticism and evolutionism as intrinsically related ideas. As this dissertation has already observed, debates provoked by the publication of the 1860 British volume *Essays and Reviews* offer a glimpse of how one of these associations first appeared, however tentatively. In this collection of treatises,

⁵⁰ Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, 198-211; Roberts, "Religious Reactions to Darwin," in Harrison, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Science and Religion*, 80-102; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 100-107; Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," 402-442.

⁵¹ Marsden, "Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," 222.

trusted Church of England leaders urged their readership to consider a new view of the doctrine of inspiration, in which the Bible was no longer assumed an eternal, unchanging revelation from Heaven.⁵² Rather, the authors depicted it as a human chronicle of humanity's growing religious understanding, and urged that it be read and used accordingly: "Interpret the Scripture like any other book," concluded one contributor.⁵³ The critics of *Essays and Reviews* were even more explicit than its authors in their association of modern biblical interpretation with developmental science. An especially aggressive reviewer complained that "Step by step the notion of evolution by law is transforming the whole field of our knowledge and opinion," and, alarmingly, that this domain no longer excluded the Bible: "the moral, the intellectual, and the spiritual are being added to its empire."⁵⁴

Beyond a limited circle of religious scholars, Americans had paid little attention to new developments in scriptural interpretation until William Robertson Smith published his popular 1881 lectures *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church*. This series built upon the radical methods of Robertson Smith's longtime friend, German scholar Julius Wellhausen, and marshaled abundant historical evidence to introduce "the ordinary English reader who is familiar with the Bible and accustomed to consecutive thought" to appreciate biblical history as the natural development of humanity's religious consciousness.⁵⁵ Although Wellhausen's degree of

⁵² Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 13, 16, 263-264.

⁵³ Benjamin Jowett, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Essays and Reviews* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1860), 330-433, quotation on 377.

⁵⁴ [Frederic Harrison], "Neo-Christianity," *Westminster Review* 74 (October 1860), 293-332, quotation on 323.

⁵⁵ William Robertson Smith, *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 289, 300, 303, 310, passim, quotation on vi.

heterodoxy found scant favor in the United States, the particular idea of the Bible as a chronicle of human evolution nevertheless provided an attractive argument against the mounting threat of impious rationalism. As evolutionary theories became more widely known, particularly those popularized by Darwin and Spencer, leaders of mainstream American Protestantism took notice and articulated their own opinions about the resonance between scientific biblical criticism and evolutionary thought. For example, Chautauqua lecturer Rev. Isaac Errett insisted in 1868 that scientific discoveries merely confirmed what the Bible had already said about the evolving character of both the natural and spiritual realms; even Jesus himself had observed, “first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.”⁵⁶ A number of Errett’s Chautauqua contemporaries suggested that the tensions between evolution and the Bible might be relieved, not by tolerating rationalism, but by exploring the evolution *of* the Bible. Modern criticism revealed the progression from primitive tribalism to the ethics of Jesus, putting the young prophet at the heart and apex of Protestant Christianity, rather than the principle of biblical infallibility. Several of America’s most celebrated clergy, including Henry Ward Beecher, Lyman Abbott, Heber Newton, and Washington Gladden, viewed theistic evolution as an especially promising weapon against modern impiety. Their popular books promoted scientific biblical criticism as a natural expression of an evolutionary worldview and brought the idea of “higher criticism” into the American public’s mind and vocabulary.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Isaac Errett, *First Principles: Or, the Elements of the Gospel, Analyzed and Discussed in Letters to an Inquirer* (Cincinnati: H. S. Bosworth, 1868), 130-151, quotation on 132. Quotation from Mark 4:28, King James Version.

⁵⁷ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 19-20, 31-32, 269-271, 460-461.

Conclusion: Commitment to Methods vs. Commitment to Conclusions

Beginning in approximately the 1860s, Protestants in the United States began to associate higher biblical criticism and evolutionary thought with greater frequency. Whether they understood this association as liberating or destructive, their view was typically that these two ideas either occupied constituent parts of the larger constellation of developments coming to be known as *modernism*, or that modern biblical interpretation flowed from the more basic claim of evolution. Henry May's disaggregation of the American Enlightenment clarifies how a particular intellectual and religious lineage adopted as practically axiomatic the belief that science and religion were innately compatible. However, tensions at this particular fault line increased as scientific biblical criticism and evolutionism spread, and we may further classify Protestant responses within May's Didactic Enlightenment by how significantly believers were willing to modify their interpretations of Scripture to accommodate modern scientific developments. The heart of this tension resided in whether one emphasized the authority of scientific *methods*, or to the actual *conclusions* produced by the conjunction of natural knowledge and biblical knowledge. One branch of Protestantism came into sharper focus, already being identified as *liberal* or *progressive*, that venerated the methods of science highly enough to consider revising any opposing biblical beliefs they had held. Another branch coalesced, already being labeled problematically as *conservative*, that clung to the traditional conclusions of biblical Christianity, at the cost of rejecting particular methods of the modernizing sciences. The techniques scorned by anti-modernists included the hypothetico-deductive approach to generating knowledge, the universal application of natural law, and the acceptance of evolution as a principle describing all existence. In addition to these two polarized categories of response, historians acknowledge that a large portion of American Protestants embraced the conviction that science and biblical

Christianity were naturally in agreement, even on difficult topics, but balked at sacrificing key biblical teachings to the claims of the modern sciences. The liberal Protestant range of responses will be explored in more detail in Chapter Five, and the conservative range in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five

The Promotion of Scientific Biblical Criticism among the American Reading Public, 1880-1930

*The cry of our times is for the application of scientific methods in the study of the Bible. It is not sufficient that such methods are employed by the consecrated scholarship of the day. The same methods must be introduced into popular Bible study.*¹

— William Rainey Harper

Introduction

In the years following the Civil War, two particular social developments contributed to a perceived threat to the status and authority of the Bible among American Protestants: popularization and irreligiousness. Throughout most of the nineteenth century, American academics had deliberately addressed their biblical scholarship to their peers, rather than to a broader and less rigorously analytical public. A number of these accomplished scholars, such as Moses Stuart and Edward Robinson, had closely studied the work of their Continental contemporaries, both radical and traditional, but they concluded that the safest and most appropriate place for such advanced discussions was within scholarly circles. The Congregationalist theologian Edwards Amasa Park worried,

There are disputes pertaining to the nature of will, to the relation of sin, which try the sagacity of the most sharp-sighted philosophers, and on which we should not invite the mechanic and the ploughman to pass a dogmatical decision... We do a wrong to our own minds, when we carry our scientific difficulties down to the arena of popular dissension.²

¹ William Rainey Harper, "Editorials," *The Old and New Testament Student* 9:1 (July 1889), 1-7, quotation on 1.

² Edwards Amasa Park, *A Discourse Delivered in Boston, before the Pastoral Association of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts, May 28, 1844* (Andover: Allen, Morrill, & Wardwell, 1844), 6.

The Rev. A. A. Pfanstiehl worried over “the danger of causing men to read the Bible with a too critical eye” and “the tendency to cause men to lose their confidence in certain portions of the Bible.”³ The Rev. W. C. Bitting pointed out “the intellectual and spiritual immaturity of teachers and pupils to whom it would be mentally and morally fruitless. We avoid the introduction of calculus into kindergartens.” The Rev. Camden M. Coburn allowed that, while it might be acceptable to share the *conclusions* of modern scholarship, it would be destructive for laity to be privy to the actual critical techniques and the refutations of beloved doctrines.⁴ At stake, these Scripture defenders believed, were the wellbeing and integrity of the nation, maintaining that a people divested of a divinely dictated canon surely risked both intellectual and spiritual peril.

This practice of segregating heterodox interpretation away from the laity was disrupted by a younger generation of scholars, beginning in the mid-1880s. These newer professors and clergy responded to the growing worry that biblical Christianity was in danger of becoming irrelevant among the seductive values of modernizing society and under the skeptical attacks of rationalists. In light of this concern, Protestant leaders such as Charles Briggs (1841-1913) and William Rainey Harper (1856-1906) promoted the expansion of serious scriptural study to include non-scholars, organizing what historian Robert Lee Carter describes as a “Bible

³ A. A. Pfanstiehl, “Gains and Losses of Modern Biblical Criticism,” *The Old Testament Student* 4 (December 1884), 157-161, quotations on 160, 161.

⁴ A. E. Dunning, Willis J. Beecher, Camden M. Coburn, John P. Peters, Amory H. Bradford, Milton S. Terry, H. Clay Trumbull and W. C. Bitting, “The Place of Biblical Criticism in the Sunday School: A Symposium,” *The Biblical World* 19:5 (May 1902), 329-344, quotation on 343.

Renaissance” through a network of periodicals, lecture circuits, Sunday school curricula, and lay Bible study courses.⁵

Although postbellum American life exhibited, if anything, an *increasingly* religious character, many Protestant leaders nevertheless feared the possibility of widespread and destructive rationalism and skepticism.⁶ Historian Susan Jacoby has popularized the description of the period 1875-1925 as the “Golden Age of Freethought”; however, organized movements of unbelievers at that time constituted only a limited phenomenon in the United States, at least in part because early religious skeptics often appeared dogmatic, abrasive, individualistic, and intellectually shallow.⁷ In the years immediately following the Civil War, the most prominent popular attacks on the traditional status and authority of the Bible acknowledged existing biblical scholarship little, if at all. John William Draper (1811-1882), Robert Ingersoll (1833-1899), and Andrew Dickson White (1832-1918) gained particular influence as authors and lecturers

⁵ Robert Lee Carter, “The ‘Message of the Higher Criticism’: The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 1-2, 12, 16-33, 35-37, 41-42; Brendan Pietsch, “Dispensational Modernism” (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2011), 39-42, 92-105, 154-157, 239; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 17-46; George Marsden, “Everyone One’s Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America,” in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79-100, on 86-87; Paul A. Carter, *The Spiritual Crisis of the Gilded Age* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1971), 14; Phillips Brooks, “The Pulpit and Popular Skepticism,” in *Essays and Addresses Religious, Literary, and Social* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1894), 61-81; Henry Ward Beecher, *Bible Studies: Readings in the Early Books of the Old Testament, with Familiar Comment, Given in 1878-9* (New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1893); R. Heber Newton, *The Right and Wrong Uses of the Bible* (New York: John W. Lovell, 1883); Washington Gladden, *Who Wrote the Bible? A Book for the People* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, Company, 1891).

⁶ Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 733-748.

⁷ Susan Jacoby, *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll and American Freethought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 149-185, *passim*.

contributing to the persistent popular conception that science and religion occupied incompatible positions. Draper's 1874 work *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* enjoyed significant popularity but limited its critique to the Roman Catholic Church, which it depicted as the most dangerous enemy of scientific progress. Exploiting the occasion of the recent First Vatican Council, Draper accused Catholicism of rejecting modern civilization, vilifying Protestantism, and subordinating reason to blind faith and facts to mystery. Broader in his attack was the flamboyant politician and orator Ingersoll, who popularized intellectual and moral arguments against the Bible. The rhetoric of the "Great Agnostic" encouraged believers to become active participants in the nation's shifting intellectual and religious landscape, and clergy rushed to defend the Bible and the land from the perceived swell of infidelity. Of these three popular antagonists, only White explicitly addressed the debates over higher biblical criticism, devoting a chapter to the topic in his influential two-volume *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896). This "biblical science," he reasoned, was the natural evolution of religion away from its superstitious and fetishistic past. He depicted this maturation of Christianity as meeting with significant resistance in the United States, particularly at Princeton Seminary, where Charles Hodge and his colleagues rebuked the scientific turn among intellectual clergy and well-read laypeople.⁸ The popular spread of infidel ideas by Draper, Ingersoll, and White reinforced the impression of many Protestant leaders that the status and authority of Christianity and specifically of the Bible were in peril.⁹

⁸ Andrew Dickson White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* v.2 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1896), 288-396, quotation on 360.

⁹ Martin Marty, *The Infidel: Freethought and American Religion* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1961), 20, cited in Eric Russell Chalfant, "Practicing Disbelief: Atheist Media in America from the Nineteenth Century to Today" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 2016), 1; Paul Stob, "Religious Conflict and Intellectual Agency: Robert Ingersoll's Contributions to American Thought and Culture," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 16:4 (Winter, 2013), 719-751, on 725-726; Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The*

This chapter will chronicle the positive impact of modern scientific knowledge on biblical criticism and efforts to return the Bible to the cultural heart of a modernizing United States. Faced with the perceived challenges to Scripture's authority and relevance, evangelical Protestant leaders, the inheritors of May's Didactic Enlightenment, split after the Civil War in their responses. The more reactionary typically demanded that traditional Bible teachings remain unchanged in the face of new knowledge and new tensions; their responses will be addressed further in Chapter Six. A different approach was promoted by a generation of mostly younger evangelical leaders such as Charles Briggs and especially William Rainey Harper. In light of the dual challenges of increased engagement of laypeople in scholarly questions and a growing nationwide anxiety about the relevance of biblical Christianity in the modern world, these innovators strove to cast off the traditional dogmatic commitment to conclusions over methods. In its place, they assured American Protestants, the introduction of modern interpretive activity to Bible literacy could revitalize the book's unique contribution to American thought and culture. Instead of outdated doctrines, they advocated a fundamentally contemporary view of Scripture to the eager readership beyond their professional scholarly circles. At the heart of this effort lay a high enough regard for the modern methods of science that these popularizers willingly relinquished traditional religious teachings to preserve the Protestant Congruence, the principle of compatibility between biblical knowledge and natural knowledge. They were convinced that a modernizing scientific worldview, including evolutionism, provided the key to developing a more enlightened biblical Christianity, more relevant to the emerging challenges, anxieties, and

Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 21-22.

questions of life in the postbellum era. Their outreach occurred through several new institutions of popular education they established, particularly the American Institute of Sacred Literature (AISL), its periodical *The Biblical World*, the Chautauqua Institution and its various derivative programs, and the Sunday School movement. I will explore in this chapter the efforts of these Protestant clergy and educators around the turn of the twentieth century to create a popular renewal of biblical study and faith, transformed by higher criticism and modern scientific knowledge.¹⁰

The secondary literature supporting this chapter is especially fragmentary, involving a number of writings addressing the various postbellum developments within American Protestantism. Central among these are Nathan Hatch's *The Democratization of American Christianity* (1989) and the work of George Marsden, most notably *The Soul of the American University* (1994) and his essay "Everyone's Own Interpreter?" (1982). I also continue to lean on Kathryn Lofton's observation in "The Methodology of the Modernists" that progressive Americans tended to demonstrate an especially strong commitment to scientific methods. Unfortunately, the dearth of secondary literature points to how underrepresented the topic of this chapter is. Most important of my sources was Robert Lee Carter's unpublished dissertation, "The 'Message of the Higher Criticism'," which provided a substantial introduction to the work of William Rainey Harper, as well as some clues to the unsustainability of the "Bible Renaissance"

¹⁰ Kathryn Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists: Process in American Protestantism," *Church History* 75:2 (June 2006), 374-402, on 377ff.; Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 23-42, 94ff.

that he fueled. Fortunately, Harper's prolific career provided a wealth of primary sources to confirm and strengthen the connections hinted at in Carter's dissertation.¹¹

My contribution to this literature more firmly locates the Victorian "crisis of faith" and its reverberations within the history of science. In particular, my research in this chapter traces the disintegration of the Protestant Congruence and its consequences for the most scientifically inclined of the American Protestants. As it became clear that the Congruence could not be maintained without a more nuanced understanding of the Bible and science, I show how Harper and his network of colleagues committed so deeply to the methods of the modern sciences that they decentered the Bible within their Protestant cosmology to make room for external forms of knowledge, a precedent with significant cultural consequences. Lastly, I establish how dependent the rearrangement of the nation's religious landscape was upon the spread of ideas related to scientific biblical criticism from their scholarly sources to a non-scholarly public eager to hear more about these controversial possibilities.

Modern Methods for a Modern World

The highly publicized heresy proceedings and lectures of biblical scholar and professor William Robertson Smith disseminated one possible strategy for defending and revitalizing the Bible's

¹¹ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); George Marsden, "Everyone One's Own Interpreter? The Bible, Science, and Authority in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Bible in America: Essays in Cultural History*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 79-100; George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Kathryn Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists: Process in American Protestantism," *Church History* 75:2 (June 2006), 374-402; Robert Lee Carter, "The 'Message of the Higher Criticism': The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995).

traditional relevance. The Scotsman promoted the work of German rationalist Julius Wellhausen, who had applied the techniques of higher criticism to Israel's ancient history and concluded that it provided a chronicle of humanity's natural process of religious maturation. Although American Protestant leaders responded with alarm to Wellhausen's rationalism, they did not deny that there existed clear evidence supporting this developmental view. They also found reassurance in the fact that his interpretation of Scripture affirmed humanity's progress from more primitive cults toward the exemplar of Jesus, helping to counter the attacks by the infidel Ingersoll and other skeptics.¹² Episcopalian preacher R. Heber Newton, for example, effused before his New York congregation, "This religion of the Christ is the one religion which to day holds the promise and potency of further evolution, in the progressive civilization of mankind on which it is enthroned."¹³ American Protestants were long accustomed to hearing the triumphalist message of Christianity as the pinnacle of religious worldviews, and they eagerly embraced the apparent historical and scientific confirmation of this belief.¹⁴

The Protestant clergy and professors who responded to the threat of infidelity by promoting rather than rejecting higher biblical criticism represented a new generation of religious expertise. No longer a generalist, the American professional religious scholar after the

¹² John Sutherland Black and George Chrystal, *The Life Of William Robertson Smith* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1912), 513, 533, 547, 551, passim; George Schodde, "Old Testament Criticism in the American Church," *The Old Testament Student* 3:10 (June, 1884), 376-387; William Robertson Smith, "Bible," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* v.3 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1878), 634-648, particularly on 648.

¹³ Newton, *Right and Wrong Uses of the Bible*, quotation on 73.

¹⁴ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 10, 14-15, 191-203, 219, 272-278, 316, 352, 460-461; Newton Smyth, *Old Faiths in New Light* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), passim.

Civil War had likely studied in Germany, focused on a specialized area of research, and developed collegial relationships through a burgeoning network of professional associations, such as the Society of Biblical Literature, the Modern Language Association, and the Archaeological Institute of America. These religious leaders refused to relinquish either biblical faith or historical scholarship, and they promised that American Protestantism could be revived if the public appreciated the potential of higher criticism for strengthening piety. Historians of American religion today, particularly those critical of the trend, have described this growing incorporation of emerging scientific methods into biblical scholarship as *theological modernism*.¹⁵

Presbyterian scholar Charles Briggs reflected triumphalistically in 1882 on the dramatic early effects of this “Bible Renaissance”:

The Higher Criticism has rent the crust, with which Rabbinical Tradition has encased the Old Testament, overlaying the poetic and prophetic elements with the legal and ritual. Younger Biblical scholars have caught glimpses of the beauty and glory of Biblical Literature. The Old Testament is studied as never before in the Christian Church.¹⁶

Lutheran professor George Schodde agreed, “Even in Germany, the land of critics and of criticism, no problems of Biblical science... provoked such a general and animated discussion as

¹⁵ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 8-10, 19; Laurence R. Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 128-133, 142-149; William R. Hutchison, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 87-94; Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 100-101, 177-208, 214-215; Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 32ff.; Brendan Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2015), 11-13, 67; Pietsch, “Dispensational Modernism” (2011), 19-21, 115-121; Lofton, “Methodology of the Modernists,” passim.

¹⁶ Charles A. Briggs, “The Literary Study of the Bible,” *The Hebrew Student* 2:3 (November, 1882), quotation on 77.

have the claims of advanced criticism in the American church.”¹⁷ Nor were these theological upheavals limited to the study of the Old Testament; professional scholars were at that time freshly casting their critical gaze upon the New Testament as well. While the Hebrew Scriptures had included claims about the age of the cosmos and earth and the emergence of life, the Christian Scriptures addressed the evidential authority of miracles and the divinely ordained unique status of the human species, teachings central to the Christian Church.¹⁸

Briggs and like-minded colleagues, notably the liberal Baptist clergyman and educator William Rainey Harper, strove to reinforce the Bible as a foundational cultural force for America in the modern age. Harper wrote glowingly about the promise of a popular resurgence in biblical Protestantism by wresting legitimate scientific methods away from the skeptical rationalists: “The movement to enlist others than professional men and specialists in the inductive and thorough study of the Scriptures, meets with encouragement on all sides.... Devout and reverent scholarship has a large opportunity to lead the multitude to unfold the Bible for themselves.”¹⁹ The Bible was also at that time undergoing another significant reconsideration; the Revised Version of the New Testament was published in 1881 and of the Old Testament in 1885, revealing to the reading public in marginal notes the principles and methods of lower (or textual) criticism. This rigorous identification of textual variants, or different versions, of manuscript and printed Bibles also impressed upon the laity that updated editions of Scripture could be not only

¹⁷ Schodde, “Old Testament Criticism,” quotation on 376.

¹⁸ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 45-48; “Fears For Christianity: Prof. Wenley Thinks Historical Research May Prove Startling,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1908, 1.

¹⁹ William Rainey Harper, “Inductive Bible-Studies,” *The Sunday School Times* 29 (October 15, 1887), 667-668, quotation on 668.

orthodox, but even beneficial to faith, and opened the door to later exploration of the more controversial higher criticism. Harper and other receptive colleagues developed and promoted institutions and programs over the next four decades to communicate modern biblical scholarship to a larger and less academic readership and to encourage the serious study of Scripture by laypeople.²⁰

Harper was the most prominent and prolific of his generation in disseminating biblical scholarship unabashedly informed by science, for both scholars and laity. He had established himself as an exceptional Hebrew scholar while he was still an adolescent, and he began teaching the language at the college level even before he was admitted to Yale's doctoral program. After graduating, he tutored in ancient languages at Denison University in Ohio, where he also offered an extracurricular course in Hebrew, and soon found himself teaching several faculty members among his students. University of Chicago Latin professor Charles Chandler recalled the young man's attraction to the application of modern science to biblical languages, even at this early date: "Semitics appealed to him as a promising field for scientific work with modern methods."²¹ Harper's career and educational influence advanced rapidly. Spurred by a recent conversion from Presbyterianism to join the Baptists, he found in his new religious home the openness and progressivism that would guide him in promoting scientific biblical criticism to non-scholars.

²⁰ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 23-29; Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism*, 92; Charles Foster Kent, "Training the College Teacher," *Religious Education*, 10:4 (August 1915), 327-332; James P. Wind, *The Bible and the University: The Messianic Vision of William Rainey Harper* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 24-25.

²¹ Chandler memoir, undated [1927], quoted in John W. Boyer, "*Broad and Christian in the Fullest Sense*": *William Rainey Harper and the University of Chicago (Occasional Papers on Higher Education XV)* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2006), 20.

Their denomination's refusal of creeds and insistence on the private interpretation of the Bible made Baptist Christians both staunchly biblicist and willing to consider modern interpretations of Scripture. In 1879 Harper began work in a new position, as instructor of Hebrew at Baptist Union Theological Seminary in Chicago. There he quickly extended the scope of his teaching, adding special classes in Sanskrit and the Chaldean variant of Aramaic to his regular courses in Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis. Not content with the limited boundaries of the seminary campus, Harper also developed summer intensive classes and correspondence courses in Hebrew, and authored a series of textbooks for elementary and intermediate study of the language. Pleased with the success of the educational resources he had offered his ministerial colleagues, Harper was also surprised at the additional interest expressed by laypeople. In 1882 he created and edited *The Hebrew Student*, a publication encouraging its readers to defend Scripture against Continental rationalistic thought by developing their knowledge of biblical languages. Within the year he had attracted five thousand subscribers, and he expanded the program to include study of the Old Testament in addition to the Hebrew language. A network of several summer schools developed, in which professors recruited by Harper taught intensive courses in Hebrew and Old Testament.²²

The American Institute of Sacred Literature

By 1889, Harper and his interested colleagues acknowledged that the study of biblical Hebrew could serve as a means to a more important end: the increased popular engagement with Scripture, revitalizing the book's relevance for modern Christians.²³ This recognition was

²² Wind, *The Bible and the University*, 29-39; Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 31-32, 41, 94ff.

²³ William Rainey Harper, "Report of the Principal of Schools of the American Institute of Sacred Literature," *The Old and New Testament Student* 11:6 (December, 1890), 364-365.

formalized in the new organization they established that autumn, the American Institute of Sacred Literature (AISL). The most ambitious of Harper's projects, the AISL provided a clearinghouse for a variety of activities related to the study of the English-language Bible, both Old and New Testaments. Its mouthpiece publication flourished under a variety of names to promote Harper's evolving vision of adult religious study relevant to a scientific age. The Institute's programming successfully helped to revive evangelical Protestant faith among American young adults, including notably attracting a significant number of women to a more scholarly study of the Bible.²⁴

The consistent message of the AISL over the next three decades reassured American Protestants that rationalism had not succeeded in destroying the message of the Bible. Harper regularly described the organization's formation as providential in marshalling its scientific approaches to defend evangelical Christianity from the dual threats of rational skepticism and scriptural literalism. This was accomplished through correspondence courses, intensive summer schools, and Bible clubs meeting regularly for group study. Although the Institute eagerly promoted scientific approaches to understanding the Bible and informed its readers even-handedly about modern schools of interpretation, it remained prudent about the higher criticism and avoided appearing to advocate too strongly for such a recent method and the conclusions it produced. As the association's Prospectus assured the readers of *The Sunday School Times* in 1889,

The American Institute of Sacred Literature has been organized with the single purpose of furnishing aid toward a more general and a more accurate knowledge of the Sacred Scriptures. Everything which bears directly upon the subject of the Bible will be included

²⁴ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 25-26, 93, 106-109.

within the scope of its work. Its aim will be to encourage and promote the philological, literary, historical, and exegetical study of the Scriptures by means of such instrumentalities as shall be found practicable.²⁵

Mindful of the controversies over the non-traditional interpretation of the Bible, the Institute described itself explicitly as independent of all doctrine. Its lessons strove to introduce laypeople to scholarly techniques of Bible study and allow them to reach their own verdicts, rather than indoctrinating them in any particular opinion about Scripture's origin or inspiration. Because the *Einleitung* or "Introduction" approach preferred among Europeans typically struck American students as excessively formal and autocratic, AISL advocated what Harper called the "inductive method," in which students conducted their own investigations and drew their own conclusions, avoiding any *a priori* theories or commitments about the Bible. Their rigorous study of modern interpretive methods could thus be claimed both scientifically and religiously sound. When managing the Institute's programming became too demanding for Harper to continue alone, he contacted about seventy professors of Hebrew and Old Testament, who agreed to a five-year commitment to help him increase Hebrew literacy and biblical study nationwide. This Council of Seventy explored the introduction of extracurricular Bible courses in American colleges, recommending that a historical and scientific approach would help the program avoid the appearance of doctrinal favoritism and the entanglement of church and state. AISL leadership paid especially close attention to the threat of religious skepticism in higher education, blaming the persistence of dogmatic and literalistic views of the Bible for the appearance of wrongheaded scientific or moral objections to its authentic message. As reactionary Protestant leaders began to object to the Institute's spreading influence, Harper and his colleagues countered with a

²⁵ George B. Stevens, "The Plan and Aims of the American Institute of Sacred Literature," *The Sunday School Times* 31:48 (November 30, 1889), 754-755, quotation on 754.

prominent series of courses attacking Fundamentalism and creationism, including topics such as “Evolution and the Bible,” “Religion’s Debt to Science,” “Through Science to God,” and “How Science Helps Our Faith.”²⁶

Although American believers generally expressed less confidence than Harper’s optimistic collegial network that higher criticism could rescue the Bible from its narrow, literalistic, and dogmatic past, many inquisitive laypeople nevertheless imbibed this hopeful message from AISL publications. Established in 1882 as *The Hebrew Student*, the Institute’s journal achieved a modest circulation of about 5,000, but far exceeded that indicator in its visibility and even notoriety, becoming regarded by the press and public as the primary periodical vehicle for higher criticism in the United States. Its contents promised that the historical and scientific approach to interpretation would inspire an objective, non-sectarian enthusiasm for the Bible, and thus a new and higher expression of religious piety; “The scientific man follows truth wherever it may lead,” boasted Harper in one editorial.²⁷ Encouraged especially by William Robertson Smith’s 1889 book *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, the journal’s authors devoted considerable attention to the archaeology of biblical lands, as this developing science appealed to the generally empirical tastes of American readers. Harper expressed his mission clearly in 1889:

The cry of our times is for the application of scientific methods in the study of the Bible. It is not sufficient that such methods are employed by the consecrated scholarship of the day. The same methods must be introduced into popular Bible study. For if the methods

²⁶ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 108-113, 115, 126-127, 137, 144, 183; Harper, “Report of the Principal,” 364ff.

²⁷ William Rainey Harper, “Editorial,” *The Old and New Testament Student* 14:5 (May 1892), 257-265, quotation on 260.

of the last century continue to hold exclusive sway, the time will come when intelligent men of all classes will say, 'If this is your Bible we will have none of it.'²⁸

The journal became only more enthusiastic over time about popularizing scientific criticism.²⁹

Harper's editorship of the Institute periodical also illustrated his attention to the importance of strategically branding his evolving vision for outreach, although he also eventually judged this adaptation unsuccessful. He had founded the journal in 1882 as *The Hebrew Student*, focusing on the importance of learning the biblical language, but a year later he renamed it *The Old Testament Student*, better reflecting his larger project of a Bible Renaissance for American Protestants. In 1889 the name changed again to *The Old and New Testament Student*, indicating that biblical archaeology and history, comparative religion, linguistics and philology, and the lower and higher criticisms had gradually extended their domain from the Hebrew Scriptures to include the Christian Scriptures, provoking a new set of opportunities and controversies. Finally, in 1893 Harper acknowledged the growing influence of the social sciences by changing the journal's name to *The Biblical World*, which it remained until 1920, when optimism about historical and scientific criticism began to wane and the magazine was absorbed by the more theological *Journal of Religion*. Harper's strategic rhetoric was also apparent in how he classified the various schools of thought about interpreting the Bible. The journal and curricula produced by AISL argued with academic rigor for a third way alongside traditional dogmatism and radical rationalism – a faithful scholarship that Harper labeled “constructive” criticism. In contrast, he distanced himself from rationalistic European scholarship by dismissing it as

²⁸ William Rainey Harper, “Editorial,” *The Old and New Testament Student* 9:1 (July 1889), quotation on 1-2.

²⁹ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 25-26, 197-198, 201, 207, 212, 234.

“destructive” criticism, although in fact the two camps sometimes arrived at the same conclusions. Harper also attempted to seize the label “higher criticism” away from its widespread association with rationalism, doggedly explaining that the term merely described scholarly questions about the date, authorship, and literary integrity of the books of the Bible. Unfortunately, these distinctions were too subtle for many laypeople, who tended to conflate all varieties of biblical criticism. Furthermore, Harper’s network also appropriated the vocabulary of the natural sciences and the ambitious rhetoric of the higher critics, such as “intelligent,” “advanced,” and “assured results,” which struck many religious readers as dangerous hubris. By the end of his career in the early years of the new century, Harper acknowledged that his campaign to reclaim difficult labels had been a mistake and had generally hindered the popular spread of scientifically informed believing criticism.³⁰

By the end of the 1910s, the AISL was beginning to lose its momentum under new leadership, and biblical purists were regaining lost ground in the production and promotion of Bible correspondence courses. With the Institute’s commitment to the *means* of scientific interpretation of Scripture, they gradually relinquished their ability to speak authoritatively about *ends*, and opponents came to view their work as essentially dressed-up rationalism, or even atheism. While the peak of Harper’s efforts around 1900 had been to reach about 10,000 students annually, by 1923 the Moody Bible Institute would claim in its advertisements to train 12,000 a year.³¹ Anti-modernist evangelicals successfully promoted alternatives to higher criticism, most

³⁰ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 46, 194-198, 213, 223, *passim*; Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1865-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 84; Harper, “Editorial,” *Old and New Testament Student* 9:1 (July 1889), 1-7.

³¹ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism”, 176-178.

prominently dispensational premillennialism, in which each of God's revelations were tailored to the needs of a particular era of human civilization. This interpretation allowed believers to explain away apparent inconsistencies in the Bible's message without questioning its absolute truth and authority or dabbling in the more dangerous forms of rationalism. One particularly combative source of this theology was the Baptist evangelist Amzi C. Dixon, writing frequent screeds against the AISL in the *Chicago Daily News* and reprinted nationwide. In turn, Harper's successors abandoned the Institute's founding principle to bring biblical purists under the big tent of scientifically informed biblical Protestantism, instead launching a concerted campaign against dispensational premillennialism in 1916. The liberal Christian theologian Shailer Mathews, for example, blamed the rising prominence of premillennialism on a secretive, dangerous cabal of money-making interests.³² In a later article, he struck an even harsher tone: the "new danger" of the regressive premillennialists as they tried to substitute "obscurantism for truth, apocalyptic vagaries for social transformation, literalism for orthodoxy, and a peculiar theory of inspiration for evangelical faith."³³ As the years passed, it became only more difficult for the opposing sides over biblical interpretation to find any common ground.³⁴

The Chautauqua Movement

Equal only to Harper's AISL courses in Bible study, the most significant popular vehicle for modern biblical education in general, and for scientific criticism in particular, was the Chautauqua movement. These educational resorts for the more comfortable classes of Americans

³² Shailer Mathews, "Jesus Is Coming!," *The Biblical World* 18:6 (December 1916), 329-30.

³³ Shailer Mathews, "Propaganda of Reaction," *The Biblical World* 49:4 (April 1917), quotation on 202.

³⁴ Lofton, "The Methodology of the Modernists," on 381.

served as a powerful cultural institution and quickly became allied with his vision of the scientific revitalization of Scripture. Founded in the early 1870s by Methodist bishop John Heyl Vincent (1832-1920) and philanthropist Lewis Miller (1829-1899) to promote modern methods of Bible study and teaching, this constellation of lectures, courses, and home study groups provided an attractive and influential outlet for Harper's enthusiasm and guidance. Originally intending to disseminate the latest developments in scriptural scholarship through a less emotional channel than the Methodist tradition of camp meetings, Vincent and Miller articulated a mission very similar to that of AISL: to build a thoroughly contemporary Bible-centered nation. Their first Sunday School Assembly opened in 1874, a two-week session attracting about 200 participants, most of them women. The course culminated in a five-hour written exam in which students rigorously defended the traditional divine origin of the Bible. Successive years increasingly emphasized the founders' commitment to providing modern education, not only to Sunday School teachers but to all Americans, especially those far from urban areas. At the end of the 1877 assembly, hoping to cultivate a sustainable institution, Vincent introduced the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC), a four-year extension program of home reading and discussion groups designed to emulate the college degree, under the motto "We study the Word and works of God."³⁵ The official newspaper of the CLSC, the *Chautauquan*, included coaching in difficult reading assignments and increasingly invoked secular sources of knowledge in the interpretation of Scripture. By 1888 the Circle would gather 100,000 members and inspire more than eighty separate programs imitating its structure and methods.³⁶

³⁵ Andrew C. Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 207, passim, quotation on 378.

³⁶ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 253-259; John H. Vincent, *The Chautauqua Movement* (Boston: Chautauqua Press, 1886), passim; Jesse Lyman Hurlbut, *The Story of Chautauqua* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), passim.

Chautauqua programming unapologetically promoted a popular enthusiasm for science as a socially and spiritually virtuous activity for men and women alike.³⁷ Historian Andrew Rieser reflects about the resort's founder, "Vincent had no formal scientific training. But he loved the *idea* of science," and he viewed Christianity as its natural intellectual partner.³⁸ Unlike the lyceums and mechanics' institutes also extant mid-century, which explored science for material and vocational gain, Chautauquans explicitly studied the physical world to better understand it as God's creation, often through the same "inductive method" as Harper's language courses. Just as the organization had begun to gain a positive national reputation for reforming postbellum Protestantism, Vincent chose science as the year's theme for 1876. Demonstrations and laboratory exercises in astronomy, chemistry, and botany, all under the watchful eye of clergy, made Chautauqua's "Scientific Congress" a biblically sound and socially wholesome exploration of the natural world. A Mrs. Belle Chandler reflected after her first visit how the principle of "survival of the fittest" was embodied by the eternal truths taught there: "From Chautauqua University will graduate men and women destined to take high rank in the science world, and they will stand firm and true against a wrong translation of these 'Manuscripts of God.' They will become as bulwarks of defense against the attacks of infidel scientists."³⁹

³⁷ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 262.

³⁸ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 45, 104, 107, quotation on 104.

³⁹ Belle Chandler, "Impressions of My First Visit," in *Chautauqua Historical and Descriptive: A Guide to the Principal Points of Interest on Lake Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Point Chautauqua, Mayville, Point Whiteside, Bemus Point, Lakewood, Griffith Point, And Jamestown*, ed. A Chautauquan (Chicago: Fairbanks, Palmer & Company, 1884), 157-158, quotation on 158.

True religion, repeated Vincent frequently, had nothing to fear from true science, with evidence of this compatibility fully apprehensible to the average layperson.⁴⁰ However, critics of Vincent's vision of the Protestant Congruence complained that this congruity involved only a relatively superficial association of science and Christian thought, similar to natural theology, rather than a more careful biblical exegesis or theological analysis.⁴¹ The institute's founder often sounded remarkably like Theodore Parker in his Romantic, practically Transcendentalist conviction that science and Protestant Christianity only strengthened each other, and he remained unconcerned about the challenges raised by scientific and biblical discoveries. Professional academics resented the implication that the "ersatz education" at Chautauqua provided a credible alternative to the rigorous study of the Bible or science. For example, MIT economist Davis R. Dewey complained, "Chautauqua is not associated with the highest academic scholarship."⁴² In response, Vincent developed elaborate commencement ceremonies to celebrate and legitimize graduates of the four-year program, resembling a Masonic initiation in their effusive, symbolic rites of passage.

For all its claims about the inherent compatibility of science and Protestant Christianity, the Chautauqua movement was initially reluctant to address the challenges posed by evolutionary thought and higher biblical criticism, but in the spirit of free inquiry accommodated a broad range of thought-provoking programming. More than a dozen Chautauqua speakers, most of them ministers, explored Darwinism in the late nineteenth century and accommodated

⁴⁰ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, on 105.

⁴¹ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 87, 104, 121, 162, 175.

⁴² Davis R. Dewey to Richard T. Ely, January 10, 1892, cited in Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 283.

evolutionary thought to some degree within the Protestant worldview of their lectures. However, several religious leaders criticized and successfully deterred further dialogue; notable among these was the tremendously influential Presbyterian evangelist and frequent lecturer T. De Witt Talmage, who warned in 1886 that all of the leading scientists who believed in this “stenchful and abominable doctrine” were infidels.⁴³ Only after 1893, when Scottish biologist Henry Drummond offered a series of lectures titled *The Ascent of Man* dramatically promoting theistic evolution, did Chautauqua audiences again regularly hear formal lectures promoting a religiously compatible developmental view of nature. Drummond’s addresses piqued such interest that a larger amphitheater was required, where guests heard that not only was biological evolution a demonstrable fact but was also accompanied by an indisputable flowering of the moral and altruistic spirit exemplified in evangelical Christianity.⁴⁴ Philosopher John Fiske repeated the message he had already been sharing for two decades, that evolution was simply God’s way of doing things.⁴⁵ The *Nation* devoted coverage to these addresses and identified their positive reception as an important bellwether, “the clearest index yet seen in this country of the silent but sweeping change wrought in the religious world by the teachings of science in regard to the origin of man,” and noted approvingly that “audiences gather to hear them with such pious edification and strengthening in their faith.”⁴⁶

⁴³ James H. McBath, “Darwinism at Chautauqua,” *Methodist History* 24:4 (July 1986), 227-237, quotation on 234; Thomas De Witt Talmage, *Our Marvellous Times: Being a Seventh Series of Sermons* (London: William Nicholson and Sons, 1884), 180-189.

⁴⁴ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 105-108; Henry Drummond, *The Lowell Lectures on the Ascent of Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1894), passim.

⁴⁵ John Fiske, *Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy: Based on the Doctrine of Evolution, with Criticism on the Positive Philosophy*, 4 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1874), passim.

⁴⁶ “The Week,” *Nation* 57 (13 July 1893), quotations on 21.

Chautauqua speakers and audiences became more willing to accommodate evolutionary science within Protestantism after the mid-1890s, and this naturally exposed them to scientific varieties of biblical interpretation. J. Max Hark of the Pennsylvania Chautauqua insisted, “there is nothing in the essential principles of Evolution that contradicts any of the essential facts of the Christian religion.”⁴⁷ What Hark and other lecturers meant by “essential” evolution was the principles compatible with a biblical worldview. The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (CLSC) in particular communicated a selective embrace of science to harmonize with core Protestant teachings. When the fledgling discipline of archaeology emerged with insights relevant to the worlds of science and the Bible, Chautauquans simply assumed that the new facts were intrinsically compatible with the Scripture teachings, just as they had done with biology, physics, astronomy, and the social sciences.⁴⁸

Chautauqua leaders regularly professed to uphold the traditional understanding of the Bible, but in practice few of Scripture’s teachings proved completely immune to reinterpretation by scientific fact. Speakers and teachers there took seriously the danger that belligerent freethinker Robert Ingersoll’s ridicule of the Bible might influence naive Christians to relinquish their faith. In response to this perceived threat of skepticism, lectures by biblical experts such as the Rev. Philip Schaff, Chair of the American Committees on Bible Revision, brought a higher level of rigor to the question of how laypeople could keep the Bible relevant in a modernizing

⁴⁷ J. Max Hark, *The Unity of the Truth in Christianity and Evolution* (New York: John B. Alden, 1888), quotation on 26.

⁴⁸ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 105-108, 151-152.

world.⁴⁹ The Rev. Theodore Flood, editor of the monthly *Chautauquan*, sympathized generally with the values of critical analysis, and his articles kept readers broadly informed of developments in modern biblical interpretation.⁵⁰ Chautauqua audiences became quite familiar with William Robertson Smith's scriptural research in *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* and in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and they followed the sensationalist heresy trials of ministers Charles Briggs and Henry Preserved Smith.⁵¹ Even more influential than Chautauqua's periodical press was the lecture platform itself, from which audiences came to expect challenging, even revolutionary views. For example, in 1893 Congregationalist minister Lyman Abbott capitalized on the institute's culture of scientific reasoning and the free and open exchange of ideas to exhort his listeners:

Let your piety be an educated piety and do not be afraid of any question that can confront you. Bring to all the problems of life an intellectual courage. First, have faith in God and the invisible world, then in that faith have a courage that will dare to grapple with every problem that may come before you. All questions of literature, all questions of history, all questions of science, all questions of philosophy, all questions of theology, all questions of Biblical history, of Biblical science, and of Biblical theology—grasp them all, be afraid of none.⁵²

Particularly significant was William Rainey Harper's involvement as a lecturer, in which he delivered the 1892 series "The Rational and the Rationalistic Higher Criticism" and set an open-minded tone for Chautauqua programming for the next two decades. Although the latest developments in higher criticism obviously threatened the most traditional interpretations of the

⁴⁹ Hurlbut, *Story of Chautauqua*, 187-188.

⁵⁰ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 189-190. 235.

⁵¹ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 272.

⁵² Lyman Abbott, "Sunday Readings: August 2," *The Chautauquan* 13:5 (August 1891) 606-607, quotation on 607.

Bible, speakers and audiences generally felt an intellectual obligation to understand even challenging claims. Typical references to Scripture at Chautauqua had shifted over several decades from “the Word of God” to “the world’s best literature.”⁵³

Not surprisingly, the more conservative Christians at Chautauqua reacted with alarm at the leadership’s unwillingness to prohibit such heresies as evolutionary thought and higher biblical criticism. *Chautauquan* articles and orthodox speakers such as Luther Townsend had taught in the 1870s that the Bible was infallible and that modern science neatly confirmed this doctrine. Through the 1880s and 1890s, however, the institute’s messages began to acknowledge where scriptural discrepancies were becoming unavoidable, and authors increasingly invoked secular sources for additional wisdom. In addition to this gradual apostasy from biblical self-evidencing, Chautauqua’s reputation also began to suffer in the first years of the new century, due in part to an increase in more entertaining programming elsewhere and to the rise of so-called “circuit Chautauquas,” which had appropriated the movement’s name and format for their traveling tent shows.⁵⁴ This dwindling of pious content was the last straw for rigidly orthodox Christians—they gave up on Chautauqua and joined Bible schools and prophecy conferences instead, a significant social development that will be addressed further in Chapter Six. Sam Jones, the South’s most popular evangelist in the late nineteenth century, lampooned Chautauqua as a faithless potpourri of diversions: “We haven’t enough religion to run a camp meeting, and

⁵³ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 260-272; Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 261-269; Hutchison, *Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism*, 77ff.; Charles Robert Kniker, “The Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle, 1878-1914” (Ed.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1969), 2, 16, 110, 113-128, 132, 136-148.

⁵⁴ Charlotte M. Canning, *The Most American Thing in America: Circuit Chautauqua as Performance* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 83.

the county fair has played out, so we organize Chautauquas.”⁵⁵ Although religious traditionalists had never actually attended in great numbers, their departure did weaken its claim to have united Christians through modern criticism of Scripture. The resort’s leaders remained convinced that biblical scholarship served the cause of truth and faith, however, and this helped them to accept the minor exodus from Chautauqua as unfortunate but necessary. What little religious content remained in its programming was generally interpreted thereafter through a modern, scientific worldview.⁵⁶

Religious Education and the Sunday School Movement

Closely parallel to the efforts in the AISL and the Chautauqua institute to popularize and promote a modern, scientific understanding of the Bible was the American Sunday school movement. All three projects had been conceived and conducted to instruct religious education teachers and interested laypeople in modern biblical study, to bring biblical knowledge in line with scientific knowledge, and to combat the extreme expressions of rationalism, skepticism, and literalism. Religious educators had customarily been poorly trained, if at all, and their teaching was rarely informed by knowledge of children’s developmental needs. Attendance in Sunday school had also become abysmal by the end of the nineteenth century, so few children even benefited from its influence. In 1902 Harper drew the nation’s attention to a “moral and religious emergency” threatening the foundations of American society: with the Sunday school failing to incorporate modern educational or religious knowledge, the future faced serious intellectual and

⁵⁵ Sam Jones, quoted by Paul M. Pearson, “The Chautauqua Movement,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* 78:464 (August 1906), 190-195, quotation on 192.

⁵⁶ Rieser, *Chautauqua Moment*, 241-242, 264-267; Kniker, “Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle,” 123-126, 130, 136, 142, 362; Hurlbut, *Story of Chautauqua*, 35-36.

moral decay.⁵⁷ With the help of his Council of Seventy, he organized the Convention for Religious and Moral Education in Chicago, calling for “more education in religion” and “more religion in education.”⁵⁸ Out of this conference emerged the Religious Education Association (REA), extending Harper’s career-long promotion of modern biblical criticism to the scientifically informed Sunday school lesson and student.⁵⁹

Both biblical criticism and the sciences seemed to suggest new approaches to raising faithful youth and averting Harper’s alarming prediction. One consequence of the historical analysis of the Bible was the interpretation that its sometimes inconsistent messages were actually intended to accomplish, or at least accommodate, the evolution of humanity’s religious consciousness. An additional insight from the emerging social sciences was the value of education appropriate to a child’s spiritual and ethical maturity. These two principles together led to the conclusion that higher criticism actually provided a scholarly justification for the modern reform of religious education. That is, the spiritual evolution of ancient Israel offered a guide to the faithful development of children.⁶⁰ One professional religious educator explained,

The new view of the Bible modified greatly the curriculum of the Sunday-school. Two great conceptions came before the vision of Sunday-school workers at the same time. They were: (1) that the Bible was the product of a long historical development, and (2)

⁵⁷ William Rainey Harper, quoted in David Setran, “‘Character Education and the Kingdom of God:’ Liberal Progressivism and the Search for a Modern Morality” (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 2000), 59, 175-176, quotation on 175.

⁵⁸ William Rainey Harper, quoted by Frank Knight Sanders, “Our Fallen Leaders,” *Religious Education* 23 (1928), quotation on 637.

⁵⁹ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 303; David Setran, “‘More Religion in Education and More Education in Religion’: Liberal Progressivism and the Educational ‘Common Faith,’ 1917-1940,” *Teachers College Record* 114:1 (January 2012), 1-29.

⁶⁰ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 315-319; Setran, “Character Education,” 177-178; Lyman Abbott, “The Week,” *The Outlook* 73:8 (February 21, 1903), 415-417.

that religious character is the result of a process of development. Sunday-school leaders sought to adapt the material of a developing religious consciousness in a great literature to the developing religious life of youth.⁶¹

Soon after its formation in 1903, the REA began to organize regular conferences on modern religious education at Chautauqua, where reputable scholars advocated methods of Bible instruction and study that would measure up to secular academic standards. Chautauqua leadership expressed their support for the tenets of the REA, and thousands of guests were exposed to scientifically informed biblical scholarship and teaching with the resort's explicit imprimatur. As with his work in AISL and Chautauqua, Harper's influence in the REA included the message that modern biblical interpretation served as the key to overcoming the intellectual divisions and dwindling interest within Protestant Christianity. At the heart of this claim was the view shared among proponents of higher criticism that scientific knowledge conferred objectivity, neutrality, and intellectual authority to the teaching of the Bible.⁶² The weekly newspaper *The Outlook* described the REA's objectives as an "eclectic but highly unified platform upon which the foundation for an ethical world society might be built."⁶³

Despite the significant institutional presence of the Religious Education Association, the American Sunday school ultimately exhibited little of the anticipated Bible Renaissance. Harper and his colleagues established the REA after the example of the National Education Association

⁶¹ Henry F. Cope, *The Evolution of the Sunday School* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1911), quotation on 191.

⁶² Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 137; "The Council of Seventy," *The Biblical World* 9:1 (January 1897), 58-61; Lyman Abbott, "The Week," *The Outlook* 73:8 (February 21, 1903), 415-417.

⁶³ "A Grand Meeting in Chicago," *The Outlook* (1903), quotation on 47, cited in Setran, "Character Education," 179.

(NEA), compartmentalizing their new institution into separate “departments” to address the specific needs of universities, theological seminaries, public schools, private schools, teacher training institutions, churches, libraries, the home, etc., although their central focus was always the Sunday school, the primary source of biblical education for Protestant laypeople. In this area, though, Harper’s call for “more education in religion” and “more religion in education” was only partially fulfilled. The modernization of Sunday school involved not only the introduction of scientific criticism into Bible study, but also a proliferation of secular resources for moral education and character-building, such that the role of the actual Bible in curricula was reduced considerably. Despite promises that a modern interpretation of Scripture would fortify Christian faith and elevate the book’s status in American culture, Harper’s campaign to transform the Sunday school produced underwhelming results.⁶⁴

The Sunday school movement proved resistant to modernization efforts, and in fact served as an especially sensitive locus for the growing hostility between Bible modernizers and scriptural purists in the 1910s and 1920s. This defiance was rooted partly in the opinion among lay educators that the REA represented the questionable interests of elite professionals, rather than offering a genuine opportunity for grass-roots participation and reform. Additionally, reactionary Protestant leaders expressed increasing concern about the infiltration of infidel thought into church classrooms. More threatening than the biblical modernizing taking place at AISL or Chautauqua, they felt, was the appearance of irreligious ideas in America’s congregations and families through their religious education programs.⁶⁵ Presbyterian biblical

⁶⁴ Carter, *Message of the Higher Criticism*, 454-457; Setran, “Character Education,” 178-179.

⁶⁵ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 421, 437-460; Setran, “Character Education,” 182-185, 278, 287-290; Elvin Keith Mattison, “A Movement Study of Fundamentalism, 1900-1960,” (Ph.D.

scholar John Gresham Machen recognized the repercussions of popularized modern biblical criticism, warning, “Modern liberalism in the church... is no longer merely an academic matter. It is no longer a matter merely of theological seminaries or universities. On the contrary its attack is being carried on vigorously by Sunday school ‘lesson helps,’ by the pulpit, and by the religious press.”⁶⁶ Charles Trumbull, editor of *The Sunday School Times*, echoed this concern, railing specifically against “the insidious injection of poison into the minds of our boys and girls,” accomplished by theological modernism and evolution in religious classrooms.⁶⁷ Although Trumbull and his paper had been open-minded about the value of modern biblical interpretation, his exposure to British evangelical teachings had convinced him by 1910 that higher criticism and the work of his former teacher Harper undermined the faith of trusting students. Later he recalled, “My twenty-five years or more of unfruitful, unsatisfactory Bible study and reading as I had been unconsciously absorbing and accepting the barren, destructive, God-denying work of the Higher Criticism, was coming to an end.”⁶⁸ Trumbull understood his conversion not as an experience of the emotions but a providential reminder of the reality of the supernatural. As one expression of its editor’s change of heart, *The Sunday School Times* abandoned scientifically informed religious education and made its new emphasis the anti-modernist, inerrantist study of the Bible, soon becoming an important mouthpiece for

dissertation, Wayne State University, 1977), 100-101; Adam Laats, “Roots of the Culture Wars: Fundamentalists and American Education in the 1920s,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2006), 131, 187-188.

⁶⁶ John Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1923), 17-18, quotation on 17.

⁶⁷ Charles G. Trumbull, “Fundamentalists Expose Modernism in the South,” *The Sunday School Times*, May 26, 1923, quotation on 324.

⁶⁸ Charles G. Trumbull, “How I Came to Believe the Bible,” *The Sunday School Times* 61 (January 25, 1919), quotation on 38.

fundamentalist thought. Harper's network of modern teachers of Scripture found itself increasingly estranged from the opponents of higher criticism, who were forging new alliances and capitalizing on new institutions and media to defend traditional Protestant doctrine.⁶⁹

Conclusion: Scientific Biblical Criticism as a New Expression of Protestantism

A new generation of leaders emerged from within American evangelical Protestantism after the Civil War, galvanized particularly by the perception of the Bible's dwindling authority and relevance in modern society. What distinguished these theologians and clergy was their commitment to bringing about a revitalization of Christian faith through the embrace of higher criticism and the latest scientific knowledge. Rather than treating science and history as threats or handmaids to an unchanging Scripture, they addressed the Bible as an evolving chronicle of human development and modified the interpretation of its texts to reflect modern, scientific epistemology. Led by Baptist clergyman and educator William Rainey Harper, the leaders of the Bible Renaissance articulated a new expression of biblical Christianity, in which the methods of science and history could even outweigh the conventional understanding of Scripture.

These religious innovators continued to explore a possible relationship between the Bible and external forms of knowledge, first described here in Chapter Two. Rather than exercising a relatively shallow version of the Protestant Congruence by glossing over points of contention, or severing the relationship and retreating into secularization, these scholars allowed the findings of

⁶⁹ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 158, 435-439; Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *Taking Men Alive: Studies in the Principles and Practise of Individual Soul-Winning* (New York: Young Men's Christian Association Press, 1907), passim; Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, *The Life that Wins* (Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Company, 1914), passim.

science and history to inform and even determine their biblical interpretations. That is, instead of holding traditional biblical teachings as axiomatic, as their predecessors had, they increasingly deferred to scientific and historical facts in the event of a discrepancy. In doing so, they were introducing a new form of epistemology, in the image of scientific exploration, into the study of Scripture—striving for objective exploration, with minimal *a priori* commitments, and trusting in the method's conclusions. This development was also aided by the growing conviction that all of creation was evolving, with no special exceptions for the Bible and its narratives; this evolutionary cosmology was especially appealing to scientifically minded Protestants when it still allowed for a providential God and for upward development. Because this developmental view included humanity, the leaders of the Bible Renaissance also advocated for religious education that was age-appropriate and modeled after secular teaching and learning. Rather than weakening or distorting the teachings of the Bible, this unprecedented reliance on scientific and historical knowledge was promoted as religiously wholesome, because it continued to insist on the relevance of Protestant faith in the modern worldview.

Harper's preeminence among his network of evangelical progressives was demonstrated most clearly in the various institutions he created and directed to disseminate scientifically informed Bible study. Most prominent among his efforts were the American Institute of Sacred Literature, the Chautauqua movement, and the Sunday school reform and Religious Education Association. In each of these cases, his tireless effort and enthusiasm disseminated the principles and conclusions of scientific biblical criticism into the homes, churches, and classrooms of Protestant Americans. It was the exposure of the nation's trusting laity to modernized Scripture that finally proved too much for reactionary evangelicals who had previously tolerated lesser

offences. Harper's institutions illustrate the rise and fall of the Bible Renaissance, and the growing polarization between innovators and purists with regard to the Bible and its proper authority vis-à-vis external sources of knowledge. While Harper and his contemporaries were not able to maintain a mass reform movement in the United States, the grassroots efforts of his opponents did, culminating in a practically irreparable cultural split, which will be addressed in detail in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six

Conservative Protestant Responses to Scientific Biblical Criticism, 1880-1930

*When the Fundamentals movement was originally formed, it was supposed that our particular foe was the so-called “higher criticism;” but, in the onward going affairs, we discovered that basal to the many forms of modern infidelity is the philosophy of evolution.*¹

— William Bell Riley

Introduction

Evangelical Protestantism had served as the dominant religious identity in the United States through the middle of nineteenth century. Historian Mark Noll credits their mastery of Henry May’s Didactic Enlightenment for this success, particularly for their influence and authority over American higher education and serious intellectual activity. Their assumption of humanity’s natural capacity to understand the abundant evidence for what was true, rational, and moral also provided a robust philosophical basis for faithful teaching and learning throughout the nation’s burgeoning network of colleges. Belief in the innate human faculty of “common sense” motivated many Protestants, particularly Didactic Enlightenment evangelicals, to yoke scientific rationality and empiricism with traditional faith in God and the Bible’s message, and to shape the nation’s educational institutions to promote this association explicitly.² Even for those inexperienced with formal religious study, the Bible nevertheless “opened up” to the pious

¹ William Bell Riley, *Christian Fundamentalist* 1 (September 1927), quotation on 8. This journal is incorrectly identified by Ferenc Szasz, and repeated by other historians, as *The Fundamentalist Magazine*, the publication of Riley’s southern rival J. Frank Norris. See William Vance Trollinger, *God’s Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 42-43.

² Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 83-88; Ferenc M. Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders: The Roles of William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and William Jennings Bryan in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1969), 169ff.

everyday reader through the power of the Holy Spirit to reveal its “plain truths” about the spiritual world and the natural world.³ However, between approximately 1865 and 1900, changes within evangelicalism and throughout the American intellectual and social landscape included a serious loss of status for this once-dominant branch of Protestantism. It is difficult to reconcile the authoritative and influential role that evangelicalism had once occupied with its later marginalization from American higher education. Historian George Marsden asked, “How was it that distinctively Christian teaching could be displaced so easily from the central and substantive role that it had held in American higher education for over two centuries and in the universities of Christendom for many centuries before that?”⁴ This displacement would come to play an important role in the decision of fundamentalist Protestant leaders to depict themselves as the marginalized and beleaguered faithful, and to focus their grassroots campaigns first against modern biblical criticism and then evolutionary teachings.

Although many have interpreted the academic marginalization of evangelical thought as evidence of an undeniable opposition between scientific and religious worldviews, the rise of the modern sciences was only one factor contributing to the shrinking dominance of conservative Protestantism in American colleges. Scholar Jon Roberts observed,

Historians have long maintained that a “revolution” occurred within American higher education during the late nineteenth century and that one of the major sources of the revolutionary impulse was science. In the name of reform, colleges and universities became more secular. The Christian faith lost its central place within higher education,

³ Brendan Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press: 2015), quotations on 97-98.

⁴ George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), quotation on 31.

and evangelical Protestants were displaced from their role as the major intellectual arbiters of American culture.⁵

A number of non-scientific postbellum developments also weakened the significant social and economic advantage that priority of settlement had given Anglo-Saxon Protestantism in the early United States. Particularly significant among these phenomena were immigration and unraveling national cohesion, growing ethnic and religious pluralism, urbanization, and industrialization. In Marsden's assessment, "By the late nineteenth century, ethnic and religious heterogeneity was becoming an overwhelming reality in American culture."⁶ Higher education was also hit especially hard by these changes and by the tides of modern thought, as the content of college programs moved away from the formation of character for affluent theologian-philosophers, toward intellectual innovation, specialized expertise, and naturalistic thought, all values more consistent with the German model of academic research. Especially after the turn of the twentieth century, non-Christian thinkers—particularly Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and Freud—helped to reinforce intellectual conventions that treated religion as irrelevant, if not patently anti-intellectual.⁷

It is true that, in addition to these general cultural developments, the status of American evangelicalism was also challenged by the late nineteenth-century rise of modernist knowledge,

⁵ Jon H. Roberts and James Turner, *The Sacred and the Secular University* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), quotation on 19.

⁶ George Marsden, "The Collapse of American Evangelical Academia" in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 219-264, quotation on 220.

⁷ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 17, 106ff.; Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: Norton, 1976), 248-286.

including scientific worldviews. Evangelicals commonly insisted that the Bible qualified as a thoroughly scientific book, and evidence from the natural sciences remained an important buttress to the intellectual footing of Protestant thought. However, as Princeton philosopher James Ward Smith observed, the harmonization of the sciences and biblical Protestantism that had occurred in the 18th century later revealed itself to be superficial.⁸ Many enthusiasts of the doxological study of nature simply added new scientific facts to the religious foundation they already accepted unquestioningly, because they confidently assumed that, per the Protestant Congruence, the Book of Nature could only corroborate the Book of Scripture. Although Protestants had generally been able to maintain this accommodation through the emergence of modern geology, astronomy, and even biology, the questions of humanity's origins posed a challenge too great for many to reconcile with the biblical claim of humanity's special divine creation. Marsden notes that both the evolutionary worldview and scientific biblical interpretation provided plausible alternative explanations of the natural order without depending critically on supernaturalism and the traditional doctrine of inspiration: "Darwinism offered accounts of the origins of life, of design, and of human intelligence itself.... [and] Biblical criticism turned the fire power of such scientific historical explanation point-blank on the origins of Hebrew religion and the Bible itself."⁹ For a significant number of evangelicals, the professed reverence for evidentialism turned out to be largely incompatible with their insistence on a biblical faith that transcended and even contradicted physical evidence. The most significant

⁸ James Ward Smith, "Religion and Science in American Philosophy," in *Religion in American Life*, vol. 1: *The Shaping of American Religion*, eds. James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 402-442, on 404, 413-425.

⁹ Marsden, "Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," 219, 222-224, 233, quotation on 224.

locus of contention within the Protestant Congruence became the debate over whether new natural knowledge would be allowed to *modify* biblical knowledge, or merely *confirm* it.¹⁰

Chapter Five of this dissertation addressed the significant impact of American evangelical thinkers who respected scientific knowledge deeply enough to allow it to outweigh even their core biblical beliefs. At first largely limited to theological institutions, this “Biblical Renaissance” involved rethinking Christian faith to align with modern scientific findings. Spreading to non-scholarly readers, the activity of accommodation ran a gamut of forms, from a veneer of Christian ethics atop a thoroughly naturalistic worldview to more explicitly religious positions in which God’s wisdom was evident in the revelations of natural knowledge. These mediating evangelicals flourished for several decades, successfully wresting the nation’s colleges from more conservative leadership, and extending scientific biblical discourse to a broad segment of the reading public around the turn of the twentieth century.¹¹

The more anti-modernist evangelicals, on the other hand, curbed their Enlightenment commitment to scientific knowledge in deference to their established understanding of the biblical narrative. These reactionary Protestants will be the subject of Chapter Six, where they continued to assert that the Bible was a thoroughly historical and scientific text by professing a circumscribed version of scientific method, in which trustworthy natural knowledge was produced primarily through the direct, personal observation of phenomena, and from which more modern developments were excluded. The principles they considered inadmissible included the

¹⁰ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 105-107.

¹¹ Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 221-222.

“speculative” activity of hypothesizing, the extension of natural law to dictate even the religious world, and the doctrine that all of creation was subject to evolution. This attenuated approach to the production of knowledge, although popular among more traditional evangelicals, would nevertheless leave its followers increasingly marginalized from American intellectual circles as the twentieth century progressed.¹² In addition to embracing and buttressing this fragile epistemology, the reactionary evangelical movements quickly became dominated by their most aggressive leaders, and the defense of Scripture and American civilization from modernist challenges developed a newly purist, activist, and militant character.¹³

Much has already been written about the rise and purported fall of American fundamentalism, and I have no wish to unnecessarily restate those well-worn arguments. However, the historians writing about this era have left rich opportunities to explore further the ambivalence toward scientific knowledge and activity across the nation’s religious spectrum. As much of this chapter involves the shifting relationships between evangelical Protestants and critical thought, I am especially indebted to histories of American higher education and histories of American evangelical intellectual activity. George Marsden in particular has noted that the basic values of the university – purported objectivity, empiricism and rationality, and generalizable knowledge – have ultimately favored naturalistic and materialistic cosmologies, which were in turn amenable to the more progressive and modernist Protestants.¹⁴ An important

¹² David N. Livingstone, “B. B. Warfield, the Theory of Evolution and Early Fundamentalism,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 58:1 (1986), 69-83, on 83.

¹³ Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 234-235; Smith, “Religion and Science in American Philosophy,” *passim*.

¹⁴ Marsden, *The Soul of the American University*, 93, 256, 362-370; Marsden, “Collapse of American Evangelical Academia,” 222-223, 233-247.

counterpoint to this runs through the scholarship of Mark Noll, particularly his clarion work *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, in which his insight as an evangelical apologist is especially valuable. Noll notes with alarm how traditionalist evangelicals squandered their historical dominance of American higher education and also alienated those within their own community who had maintained intellectual credibility.¹⁵ Also useful as a general foundation to this chapter has been the history of anti-modernism in the United States, especially Jackson Lears's *No Place of Grace*, in which he described the "recoil" of many Americans from the shock of modernism, even as they benefitted from its fruits.¹⁶ The aforementioned selective approach to scientific knowledge is evident in the religious anti-modernist movements constituting the phenomenon of American fundamentalism. This chapter also leans heavily on the story of the charismatic and unyielding person of Minnesota Baptist preacher William Bell Riley, rightfully considered the architect of the American fundamentalist movement. I am especially indebted here to the intellectual and religious biography from William Trollinger, Jr. and the unpublished dissertation of Ferenc Szasz, which document in detail the meteoric rise and embarrassing deterioration of Riley's leadership.¹⁷ The proliferation of evangelical writings in the early twentieth century, such as the pamphlet series *The Fundamentals*, and a wealth of monographs and popular periodicals, offer an important glimpse into the formation, self-definition, and institutional reinforcement of

¹⁵ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 83-145; Mark A. Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37:2 (Summer 1985), 216-238.

¹⁶ T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).

¹⁷ William Vance Trollinger, *God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990); Ferenc M. Szasz, "Three Fundamentalists: The Roles of William Bell Riley, John Roach Straton, and William Jennings Bryan in the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy" (Ph.D dissertation, The University of Rochester, 1969).

this significant mass movement. The disagreements and competition for primacy within Riley's circle over fundamentalism's direction and strategies provide a much richer picture than the popular stereotypes of a homogenous throng of mindless followers.

This dissertation narrative presses beyond the existing literature to explore the earnest efforts of these reactionary Christians to make a place in their biblical worldview for scientific knowledge. Fundamentalists labor to take science as seriously as possible, within the context of their existing commitments to the Bible's teachings, belie the purist rhetoric that earned them a reputation as anti-scientific and anti-intellectual. Instead, we are able to see their acknowledgment of the cultural importance of science, even as they defended their exclusion of its modern forms such as evolutionary thought. The fundamentalist navigation of the boundary between values and facts also helps to provide contextual balance to the popular overrepresentation and simplification of the 1925 *Scopes* Trial, which has been widely misunderstood as the single death knell of fundamentalism. Rather, the trial and its sensationalist media coverage are understood here as one of several developments in the rise, deceleration, and dispersal of fundamentalist intellectual, social, and institutional activity.

Reversal of Fortune: Anti-Modernist Protestant Reactions

It had seemed by the dawn of the twentieth century that the traditional biblical worldview had yielded its intellectual and cultural dominance to more modern approaches to constructing knowledge. Confidence in humanity's intellectual progress was generally growing in the postbellum United States, with the most prominent and influential preachers in the nation disseminating scientific forms of biblical criticism and riding the coattails of evolutionary

thought in their messages.¹⁸ In 1885 Henry Ward Beecher had claimed in his sermon series *Evolution and Religion* that the scriptural controversy had been resolved in his mind through a scientific interpretation rather than resorting to atheistic materialism.¹⁹ Nearly fifteen years later, Yale professor G. A. Smith confidently concluded his lecture on biblical scholarship, “We may say that Modern Criticism has won its war against the Traditional Theories. It only remains to fix the amount of the indemnity.”²⁰ However, British journalist W. H. Mallock, who wrote extensively around the turn of the century on the relationships between religion and science, cautioned presciently that only the most sanguine or inattentive could come to these conclusions, and that the controversies over scriptural scholarship had merely entered a new phase.²¹

Not surprisingly, in the United States the backlash to scientific biblical criticism first coalesced at colleges and theological seminaries, where intellectual professionals cultivated the greatest awareness and comprehension of modern scriptural interpretation. Some of the American scholars most familiar with the arguments of higher criticism also served as its fiercest opponents. Moses Stuart at Andover Theological Seminary (fl. 1809-1848), Charles Hodge at Princeton Theological Seminary (fl. 1820-1878) and, less significantly, Andrews Norton at Harvard College (fl. 1819-1830), had all rejected its methods and conclusions as radical and

¹⁸ Ferenc Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 8.

¹⁹ Henry Ward Beecher, *Evolution and Religion* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1885), 13-24, passim.

²⁰ G. A. Smith, *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1901), quotation on 72.

²¹ W. H. Mallock, “Religion and Science at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century,” *The Fortnightly Review* 76 (September 1901), 395-414, on 395.

destructive. However, their ability to halt the spread of heterodox biblical scholarship, beyond publishing strongly worded articles in theological journals, was ultimately minimal. In addition to this academic peer pressure, iconoclastic biblical scholars also faced the power of denominations and colleges to punish dissent. Three especially prominent examples of American intellectual leaders – Scottish scholar William Robertson Smith, Baptist academic William Rainey Harper, and Presbyterian theologian Charles Augustus Briggs – illustrate the degree to which official heresy trials failed to contain the spread of modern biblical interpretation. As Chapter Three has detailed in the particular case of Robertson Smith, high-profile ecclesiastical prosecutions in the United States not only served to draw greater attention to an embarrassing lapse of orthodoxy but also further disseminated heretical ideas to the curious public. Moreover, high-flown rhetoric aside, the primary intent of each trial was to protect doctrinal integrity within their own denomination alone, so the broader impact of such tribunals was limited.²²

More than the disapproval of conservative scholars or the threat of heresy trials, two particular factors in the early twentieth century reflected the clearly shifting balance of power from the promoters of more modern scholarship to the defenders of traditional biblical teachings: the slowing momentum of the Bible Renaissance, and the grassroots reactionary movement that came to be known as Fundamentalism. The first decade of the twentieth century saw the American public's interest in higher biblical criticism pass its peak. William Hayes Ward,

²² Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2014), 13, 108-109; Noll, "Common Sense Traditions," 216-238; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 83-145; Robert Lee Carter, "The 'Message of the Higher Criticism': The Bible Renaissance and Popular Education in America, 1880-1925" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1995), 36-42, 54ff.; Adam Laats, "Roots of the Culture Wars: Fundamentalists and American Education in the 1920s," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2006), 40.

clergyman and editor of the progressive New York Congregationalist newspaper *The Independent*, had been a longtime proponent of modern biblical criticism. He reflected in 1913 after the death of Charles Briggs that the

freedom of research and instruction has been practically established in every institution that pretends to be more than a recruiting station for some particular brand of medievalism. The right and duty of using critical methods in biblical studies have been fully achieved and vindicated by results.... The opponents of progress have been chagrined and defeated at every point.²³

In the years that followed, however, efforts flagged in accommodating biblical Christianity to the age of scientific modernism, for several reasons. The popular secular media lost interest in the topic, especially in light of the tensions leading to World War I. The first generation of the Bible Renaissance's leaders died with no comparably prominent and energetic successors to take up their campaign. The institutions and individuals advocating for the use of evidence external to the Bible naturally found themselves estranged from the circle of experts entrusted to speak about the meaning of Scripture.²⁴ Additionally, American Protestants increasingly expressed their disappointment that modern biblical scholarship seemed to offer only a religiously unsatisfying conclusion, that humanity's spiritual consciousness had been evolving. Scientific biblical criticism did not convey the pastoral reassurance for which there was apparently still a powerful need. Reactionary works exploited this backlash against the intrusion of educated elites and scientific values into the Bible. Giovanni Papini's 1923 *Life of Christ* boasted of being "written by a layman for laymen" and explicitly attacked "the insipidity of scientific literature,

²³ William Hayes Ward, "Gains in Old Testament Criticism," *The Independent* 74 (June 26, 1913), quotation on 1447.

²⁴ Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 67-73.

called ‘scientific’ only because it perpetually fears to make the slightest affirmation.”²⁵

Moreover, it should not escape our attention that Protestants’ hunger for romanticized accounts of Jesus’ life was such that they were willing to embrace this Catholic author’s account – no small development in a time of significant anti-Catholicism in the United States. The affection for dogmatic, sentimental interpretations of Scripture drove impressive demand for the Bible in the inter-war years: the American Bible Society reported the sale of 30 million copies in 1922 and 40 million in 1923. A variety of signs indicated that the tide was turning against the previously successful campaigns to accommodate Bible interpretations to the growing authority of scientific knowledge.²⁶

The early twentieth century saw a significant reorganization of the relationships among anti-modernist American Protestantism, higher education, and scientific thought. Many evangelical faculty and clergy became increasingly estranged from mainstream scholarly circles and drifted into collaboration with less rigorous networks they had previously disdained. As Noll summarizes this period:

The professionalization of the university, the rise to dominance of critical conclusions in the new university, the growing irrelevance of evangelical scholarship to the world of the university, the fascination of university scholars with world religions, and the marriage of convenience between conservative scholars and the revivalist tradition led to a radical

²⁵ Giovanni Papini, *Life of Christ*, tr. Dorothy Canfield Fisher (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1923), quotation on 10.

²⁶ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 67-78; George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7, 35-36, passim; “The Increasing Demand for the Bible,” *The Literary Digest* 76 (February 10, 1923), 35-36 and “Hungry for Religious Books,” *The Literary Digest* 80 (March 29, 1924), 34, cited in Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 79; Lears, *No Place of Grace*, 22-24.

disengagement of conservative evangelicals from the broader world of Bible scholarship.²⁷

However, the modernist end of the intellectual spectrum was struggling as well to maintain its appeal to non-scholarly Americans. The more feared possible repercussions of scientific biblical criticism – particularly the rejection of supernaturalism – alienated many traditional Christians and appealed to a relatively small audience. Liberal proponents of modern interpretations of Scripture recognized that the term “higher criticism” was being used primarily in a pejorative sense, and finally discarded this label over its materialist, anti-religious, and German associations. Although progressive varieties of biblical scholarship, taking into account the latest findings from science and history, dominated scholarly circles and all but a few institutions of higher education, by the 1920s a significant faction of biblical conservatives had reasserted their dominance over non-scholarly Protestant activity, eventually reigning nearly completely over the field of popular Bible study. The success of Papini’s *Life of Christ* and other romanticized accounts indicated that many Americans who took the Bible seriously apparently preferred a sentimental depiction of Jesus, rather than a scientific, historical, but relatively sterile portrayal. While progressive Protestantism continued its dominance over universities and colleges in the United States, the growing movement of anti-modernist biblical interpretation attracted its followers largely from outside of both mainstream denominations and higher education.²⁸

²⁷ Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), quotation on 47.

²⁸ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 67-68, 71, 73; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 255ff.

One indication that the battle lines in the United States over scientific biblical criticism were moving toward the popular and populist front in the first two decades of the new century was the flourishing publication of pamphlets and booklets about the proper understanding of the Bible. With titles such as *Bible Criticism and the Average Man* and *The Plain Man and His Bible*, these missives pointedly directed their message to non-scholars and unaffiliated Protestants, exploiting the popular desire for a Scripture interpretation that was comforting and uncomplicated. The pamphlets generally depended on two not entirely compatible claims: first, that authentic science was determined only by directly observable evidence rather than by speculative means such as hypothesis; second, that whenever it appeared that science and the Bible were in disagreement, it was surely the “established” knowledge of Scripture that was the more trustworthy.²⁹ One of the authors, Methodist minister William Henry Fitchett, lamented the alienating effect of elite authority on biblical scholarship: “the storm of criticism beating on the Bible at the present moment is loud, and the average man... can only wait till the experts have come to some agreement, no matter how long the process must take; and must accept their ‘conclusions’ with resigned meekness.” His jeremiad against the sovereignty of specialist knowledge insisted that, in fact, the claims of the Bible actually lay beyond the ability of

²⁹ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 54-55; Geoffrey R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, McPherson and Hammond* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 67-90; Howard A. Johnson, *Bible Criticism and the Average Man* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1907); Len G. Broughton, *The Plain Man and His Bible* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1909); Robert Anderson, *Pseudo-Criticism, or the Higher Criticism and Its Counterfeit* and *The Bible and Modern Criticism* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1905); John Urquhart, *The Bible: Its Structure and Purpose* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1904); John M. Leavitt, *Bible League Essays in Bible Defence and Exposition* (New York: Bible League Book Company, 1909).

scientific method and biblical criticism to confirm or refute, although he reassured readers that “the common sense of the plain man can judge them with confidence.”³⁰

A Strategic Revision of Purpose

Although the most prominent movement of reactionary biblical Protestants would eventually choose evolutionary thought as its primary opponent, this grassroots crusade began instead in opposition to modernist biblical criticism. British editorialist Samuel Ratcliffe looked back on 1922 and concluded that, at that time, evolution was apparently not yet a widespread concern for American fundamentalists.³¹ William Bell Riley, whom this dissertation will soon address in greater detail, reminisced in 1927, “When the Fundamentals movement was originally formed, it was supposed that our particular foe was the so-called ‘higher criticism’; but, in the onward going affairs, we discovered that basal to the many forms of modern infidelity is the philosophy of evolution.”³² In one of the most well-known publications defending orthodox biblical Christianity, a series of mass-produced pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* (1910-1915) gave considerably more attention to the integrity and authority of the Bible than to evolution. One of the essayists in this collection, evangelical minister Arno C. Gaebelein, spent half a century aggressively promoting the tenets of the burgeoning Fundamentalism movement in his nationwide Christian periodical *Our Hope*. Gaebelein had left the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1899 over the spread of higher criticism among his ministerial colleagues, and he set a prominent

³⁰ W. H. Fitchett, *Where the Higher Criticism Fails: A Critique of the Destructive Critics* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1922), quotations on 14-15, 191.

³¹ S. K. Ratcliffe, “America and Fundamentalism,” *Contemporary Review* 128 (September 1925), 288, cited in Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 158.

³² Riley, *Christian Fundamentalist* 1 (September 1927), quotation on 8.

precedent for extra-denominational activity by building a powerful ministry free from the restraint of mainstream institutions. Scarcely an issue of *Our Hope* was released without Gaebelein devoting editorial space to attack the intrusion of external sources of knowledge into the traditional understanding of Scripture as self-authenticated. For example, in 1914 he stormed, “Bible Criticism — Modernism — Apostasy — Socialism — Anarchism — Ruin. These six words form a slimy river. The source is the destructive Bible criticism.”³³ Like practically all of his conservative contemporaries, Gaebelein made no distinction between scientific biblical criticism and other varieties of modern scriptural scholarship, for they were all the illegitimate intrusion of worldly concerns into the self-evidencing integrity of the Bible’s message.³⁴

Moreover, when proponents and opponents of modernist biblical criticism described its appearance in American circles, both groups commonly invoked early nineteenth-century Unitarian minister Theodore Parker as its source. Although he had died in 1860 with no particular intellectual heirs to carry forward his innovations in scriptural interpretation, abolitionists and Unitarians continued to refer to Parker as a significant religious and social forebear. Surprisingly, conservative Protestants also regularly singled him out as the fountainhead of heretical biblical scholarship in the United States. For example, the British evangelical newspaper *Christian Observer* took the opportunity of Parker’s death in 1860 to

³³ Arno C. Gaebelein, “Current Events: In the Light of the Bible,” *Our Hope* (1914), quotation on 224; Michael Darrel Stallard, “The Theological Method of Arno C. Gaebelein” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1992), 4, 14, 38-39, 292ff.

³⁴ Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 54ff.; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 158ff.; Robert Elwood Wenger, “Social Thought in American Fundamentalism” (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 1973), 30-33.

compare at length his heterodox ideas with the recently published *Essays and Reviews*. The article noted their nearly identical positions with respect to:

1. The Education of the World, or the Development of the Human Race.
2. The Bible subordinate, not supreme.
3. The Bible not infallible, but often erroneous.
4. The Miracles of Scripture incredible.
5. The Bible superstitiously venerated.
6. Christian Missions mistakenly conducted.

and concluded that they had both sprung from the same root of “modern rationalistic infidelity” to produce separate but identical fruit: “We believe that there is no essential difference between the views of the Seven Essayists and those of Theodore Parker.”³⁵ The orthodox defenders of the Bible continued well into the twentieth century casting Parker as the serpent introducing destructive biblical criticism into the Eden of American Christendom. William Bell Riley’s major 1909 work *The Finality of the Higher Criticism* also singled out Parker for disseminating a view of the Bible “acceptable to human nature.” Explicitly linking Parker’s biblical criticism with evolutionism, Riley lamented that this fallen worldview encouraged humanity to acquiesce to its most bestial inclinations, rather than straining after its highest possible standards.³⁶ The long-term animosity of many Protestant leaders toward non-traditional interpretation would thus readily give way to the more populist battle against evolutionary thought, and at the same time entrench in anti-modernist Protestantism an expediently limited definition of science.³⁷

³⁵ “Theodore Parker and the Oxford Essayists,” *Christian Observer* 271 (July 1860), 467-487, quotation on 471-476.

³⁶ William Bell Riley, *The Finality of the Higher Criticism: The Theory of Evolution and False Theology* (Minneapolis: W. B. Riley, 1909), 133ff.

³⁷ Wenger, “Social Thought in American Fundamentalism,” 30-31; Carter, “Message of the Higher Criticism,” 54-55.

Influential fundamentalist leaders concluded that evolutionary thought provided a more practical opponent than higher biblical criticism, for a number of reasons. First, while modern biblical scholarship actually posed a more direct threat to scriptural orthodoxy, it was also a discipline requiring considerable specialized expertise to be able to debate effectively. Ferenc Szasz observes, “One would have to be fluent in Greek, Hebrew, Latin, and Aramaic to discuss it intelligently. Who was to say, for instance, if *yom* were translated ‘day’ or ‘era’? Here was one area which was gladly given over to the scholars.”³⁸ Since conservative evangelicalism had already lost its former dominance of America’s scholarly institutions, fundamentalists could hardly hope for a successful campaign there, and looked instead to the popular sphere, including to Protestants not loyal to any particular denomination. Second, in the early twentieth century, there was still enough favor within the big tent of evangelical Christianity for modernism and liberalism that these two philosophies could not yet be scapegoated for the weakening influence of the biblical narrative. Better was the threat of evolutionism, which carried sinister and foreign connotations and was invoked so loosely that the various camps of fundamentalism could easily unite against the term. Evolutionary teachings encompassed what many saw as the very forces destroying America: an attack on the authority of the Bible and of Jesus as Savior; an apparent endorsement of raw, animal brutality and aggressiveness, especially frightening in the aftermath of the Great War; and a demotion of humanity from God’s favored creation to a mere collection of soulless particles and deterministic forces. As an adversary, evolution provided fundamentalists with a more broadly accessible occasion for criticizing and redeeming the backsliding United States. The intellectual and moral integrity of scientific teachings had repercussions for every school’s classrooms, after all, and the prospect of a cultural crusade

³⁸ Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 162-169, quotation on 163.

suited the belligerent temperament and activist methods of the particular fundamentalists then seizing the reins of the growing movement.³⁹

Even as the majority of reactionary expressions of biblical Protestantism focused on the threat of higher criticism, a few voices early in the new century were already pointing to evolutionary thought as a contributing factor, or worse. The influence of these leaders played an important part in the eventual reputation of Fundamentalism as an anti-scientific movement. While not the only source of statements from the defenders of traditional biblical knowledge against new methods of interpretation and the modernist sciences, the essays of *The Fundamentals* provide a relatively comprehensive view of conservative American Protestant thought in the 1910s. Franklin Johnson, professor of church history at the Chicago Divinity School, contributed “Fallacies of the Higher Criticism” to the second volume of the series, scorning the inclusion of evolutionary theory in legitimate literary and religious criticism because it could not account for humanity’s “progress under the influence of supernatural revelation.” He continued, “the hypothesis of evolution in any form, when applied to human history, blinds us and renders us incapable of beholding the glory of God in its more signal manifestations,” reducing the Bible to “only a product of human nature working in the field of religious literature ... merely a natural book.”⁴⁰ Another essayist, the Texas Baptist James J. Reeve, articulated a common position in praising scientific and historical method, properly

³⁹ Ferenc M. Szasz, “William B. Riley and the Fight against the Teaching of Evolution in Minnesota,” *Minnesota History* 41:5 (Spring 1969), 201-216.

⁴⁰ Franklin Johnson, “Fallacies of the Higher Criticism,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. (Reuben Archer) Torrey, (Chicago; Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 2:3, 48-68, quotations on 55.

practiced, but drawing the line at evolutionary thought as “fundamentally contradictory to the Biblical and Christian point of view,” indicating that the advance of natural knowledge was circumscribed by existing scriptural teachings. Reeve penned one of the clearest early statements that the “theory of evolution underlies and is the inspiration of the Higher Criticism... All natural and mental phenomena are in a closed system of cause and effect, and the hypothesis applies universally, to religion and revelation, as well as to mechanisms.”⁴¹ These claims in *The Fundamentals* that it was actually evolutionary theory at the heart of modern biblical criticism were circulated to practically every religious professional in the English-speaking world, amounting to more than a quarter million copies of each essay.⁴²

William Bell Riley: The Architect of American Christian Fundamentalism

Without a doubt the most significant and influential American figure to identify an evolutionist threat in modern biblical criticism was Baptist preacher William Bell Riley. The central architect of fundamentalism in the early twentieth-century United States, Riley was lauded by one Indiana minister as “the Apostle Paul of our American ministry” for his role in reinvigorating biblical Protestantism and extending its influence further into American cultural and political spheres.⁴³

⁴¹ James J. Reeve, “My Personal Experience with the Higher Criticism” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, ed. R. A. (Reuben Archer) Torrey, (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 3:6, 98-118, quotations on 99, 100, 103.

⁴² Ronald L. Numbers and John Stenhouse, *Disseminating Darwinism: The Role of Place, Race, Religion, and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 171, n80; David N. Livingstone, D. G. Hart, Mark A. Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and Science in Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 111-112; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 118-123; Michael Lienesch, *In the Beginning: Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial, and the Making of the Antievolution Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 19-22.

⁴³ Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, quotation on 40; William Vance Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity—Northwestern Bible School and the Fundamentalist Empire of William Bell Riley” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984), 20, quotation on 70-71.

Riley seemed to possess all the qualities needed to climb quickly into a position of leadership. Others of his colleagues influenced only a limited region, or were too combative to merit respect, or lacked administrative prowess, but Riley evinced a broad set of qualifications and was able to shape the movement according to his personal values and temperament. His legacy endures especially in the lasting divide he orchestrated between fundamentalist and modernist views of the relationship between the sciences and the Bible.⁴⁴

Riley was born in 1861 into a family of deeply religious Midwestern tobacco farmers, and he lifted himself out of their impoverished circumstances by pursuing an education. After securing his teaching certificate, he had intended to pursue a law career, but felt a stronger call into ministry. With the financial help of a generous neighbor, Riley attended Hanover College in southern Indiana, already demonstrating a powerful pugnacious streak by graduating first in debate, and then continued his studies at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. Inspired and mentored by the famous evangelist Dwight Moody, Riley graduated in 1888 a deeply orthodox young pastor, although perhaps never sharing in his mentor's "broad and tolerant spirit."⁴⁵ Where Moody had reached out to proponents of modern biblical criticism and evolutionary thought, despite his intellectual disagreement with their tenets, his young disciple had no such patience and would encourage instead the successful tactic of drawing hard battle lines. After serving a series of Baptist churches around the Midwest, Riley settled in 1897 at the

⁴⁴ Charles Allyn Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism: Seven Biographical Studies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 79-106.

⁴⁵ Trollinger, *God's Empire*, quotation on 168; Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," quotation on 25.

First Baptist Church of Minneapolis, whence he would aggressively manage the formation and determine much of the character of the American Fundamentalist movement.⁴⁶

Riley's upbringing, education, and training instilled in him a set of values that remained remarkably consistent throughout his career. First and foremost, he believed fervently that the original texts of the Bible, although humanly transcribed, were divinely authored and therefore inerrant. Every one of its passages was both historically and literally true, and any claim to the contrary necessarily rested on false premises or irresponsible reasoning. This principle served as the cornerstone of his entire belief system, apparently preceding even his beliefs about God, Jesus, and the Church, and he promoted it relentlessly in his shaping and leadership of American Fundamentalism. A corollary of this worldview was that modernist biblical scholarship was incompatible with orthodox Protestantism, because at its heart lay the false science of evolution. Riley reasoned that, because of the inseparable falsehoods of higher criticism and evolutionism, humanity was turning away from God, and modernist knowledge no longer included even the pretense of resting on a Christian foundation. This crisis of western civilization, he concluded, necessitated that evangelicals step into a more militant and uncompromising role in American society.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," 21ff.; Martin Marty, *Modern American Religion, Volume I: The Irony of It All, 1893-1919* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 209-214.

⁴⁷ Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," 12, 42-49, 78-79; Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," 34ff., 67-112; Szasz, "Fight against the Teaching of Evolution," 201-203; Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 34-40, 57, 93, passim.

Riley's young adulthood and career demonstrated his pugnacity and persistence in the defense of orthodox biblical interpretation and his willingness to attack those who would challenge or fail to uphold it. In his seminary graduation speech in 1888, he was already identifying rationalism as the centuries-old enemy of orthodox Protestantism, a foe that had historically appeared regularly in different guises, but most recently in false philosophies from Germany. Riley reassured his audience, however, that defenders of the evangelical faith had triumphed in the past over this adversary, and would again, if they were prepared to go to battle.⁴⁸ His early years in ministry confirmed for him the necessity of this struggle as he encountered unrepentant heterodoxy, particularly among the ministers and professors from the University of Chicago. When he arrived as the new pastor to the First Baptist Church of Minneapolis in 1897, he almost immediately began to consolidate his administrative might against opponents within and without the congregation. Successfully driving out his critics and restructuring the institution to his advantage, Riley extended this empire by founding Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School in 1902, the first of three evangelical schools he would establish under the Northwestern name. His seemingly limitless energy also produced more than sixty books and dozens of articles, as well as establishing his own periodicals: *Baptist Beacon*, *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church*, *Christian Fundamentalist*, and *Northwestern Pilot*. Seemingly in every area of his life, Riley evinced his fervent belief that doctrinal orthodoxy was not enough; proper belief must be entrenched and defended by militant action, particularly in the amassing of institutional power.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Marie Acomb Riley, *The Dynamic of a Dream* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1938), 53-58.

⁴⁹ Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," 29-41, 49; Russell, *Voices of American Fundamentalism*, 82-88.

Having sharpened his confrontation skills against uncooperative congregational leaders, it wasn't long before Riley found an external opponent worth meeting in battle. At the April 15, 1907 meeting of the Twin City Baptist Ministers, Riley was shocked to hear the speaker, zoologist and philosopher Charles Sigerfoos of the University of Minnesota, unashamedly defend the philosophy of evolution. After confirming that Sigerfoos also exposed his students to such infidel teachings, Riley managed to be scheduled as the next week's speaker, when he railed about "Skepticism and the Scholars."⁵⁰ He compiled this address and the lectures and sermons that followed into the volume *The Finality of the Higher Criticism* (1909), an explicit repudiation of *The Finality of the Christian Religion* by George Burman Foster, a Baptist scholar at the University of Chicago Divinity School. In *Finality*, Riley articulated his understanding of the world of knowledge and his rejection of evolutionary thought, convictions that would remain essentially constant throughout his life and shape the most influential fundamentalist institutions in the United States.⁵¹

One particular theoretical criticism typically served as the cornerstone of Riley's arguments. Although he would also stir up his audiences with warnings of the disastrous religious and social consequences of relinquishing the Bible creation narrative for the soulless ideology of evolutionism, it was a claim about the nature of science that he wielded as his primary weapon.⁵² He insisted, "the first and most important reason for its elimination is the

⁵⁰ Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," 76-80, 111 n26; Riley, *Dynamic of a Dream*, 101-104.

⁵¹ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 5-24, passim.

⁵² Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 30-48, 72-82, 95-100.

unquestioned fact that evolution is not a science; it is a hypothesis only, a speculation.”⁵³ Riley’s claim relied on the definition of *science* in the Funk and Wagnalls *Standard Dictionary of the English Language* (1897): “knowledge gained and verified by exact observation and correct thinking,” a phrase widely repeated verbatim by non-scientific institutions and publications at the time.⁵⁴ He crowed, “That definition takes you at once out of the realm of speculation. It disposes of such terms as ‘theory’ and ‘hypothesis.’”⁵⁵ In this conclusion Riley and his followers also availed themselves of the Funk and Wagnalls definition of *theory* as “a plan, or scheme subsisting in the mind, but based on principles variable by observation; loosely and popularly, mere hypothesis or speculation; hence an individual view.” He elaborated, “A theory may be scientific; but to make it such one must produce its verification by exact observation or experiment, whereupon it is no longer a theory. Neither Huxley, Darwin nor Spencer ever maintained that they had produced such verification of evolution!”⁵⁶ This distinction between true science and speculative theorizing was key to the exclusion of modernist thought from reactionary evangelical Christianity. In misunderstanding that, to scientists, an evidentially substantiated hypothesis is *precisely* a theory, the early leaders of American fundamentalism were able to reject evolutionism as speculation while insisting on the scientific legitimacy of their own position. Furthermore, not only did evolutionary thought fail to qualify as biblically sound science, Riley fumed, but its proponents also attempted to apply it universally, claiming

⁵³ [William Bell Riley] “The Evolution Controversy!” *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 4 (1922), quotation on 5; Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 78-80, quotation on 78-79.

⁵⁴ Isaac K. Funk, ed., *A Standard Dictionary of the English Language, Volume 2* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1897), s.vv. “science,” “theory,” 1598, 1871.

⁵⁵ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, quotation on 95.

⁵⁶ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, quotation on 76.

that it accounted for all of creation, including both the material and spiritual worlds.⁵⁷ Because evolutionists refused to keep to their own discipline, Riley vowed that neither would he: “Every preacher of the present hour is compelled to deal with the theory of evolution, and either accept it or reject it. Its advocates have invaded his realm.”⁵⁸ In Riley’s view, the peaceful segregation of professions suggested by firebrand skeptic Thomas Cooper almost exactly a century earlier was an unacceptable dereliction of duty; the defense of biblical knowledge and moral civilization demanded an uncompromising crusade of the Christian faithful.

In addition to Riley’s relentless empire-building, there was a larger cultural development that made the upper Midwest a hospitable location for an intellectual showdown over evolutionism. There were significant denominational and regional differences in the late nineteenth century in response to the developmental theories generally subsumed under the label of “Darwinism.” In the South, evolutionism had already attracted widespread suspicion as a speculative and infidel concept. The combination of Puritan theology, Scottish philosophy, and Baconianism had influenced Southern thought to hold the Bible as a compendium of hard fact on matters both spiritual and natural, and alternative worldviews typically failed to find purchase there. By contrast, in the North, modernist thought had already become successfully entrenched in Methodist and Protestant Episcopal circles, and in the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations the two sides found equal enough sympathy to invite fierce struggles for control of the movements.⁵⁹ In fact, it was from this very tension in the Northern Baptist Convention that editor

⁵⁷ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 6, 72-73.

⁵⁸ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, quotation on 73.

⁵⁹ E. Brookes Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1978), 72-126, *passim*.

Curtis Lee Laws would coin the word *fundamentalist* to identify those willing “to do battle royal for the Fundamentals.”⁶⁰ George Marsden confirms, “In the North, the cultural forces for change which fanned the new religious ideals were so strong that stamping out the spark in one place could not prevent a general conflagration.”⁶¹

Although Riley had indicated in *Finality* that he was prepared to organize an international campaign against the threat of modernism, he was initially unable to incite his evangelical allies to join him in protest. He extended a call at the 1910 National Baptist Convention in Chicago, but his colleagues were ambivalent enough about activism and alarmed enough by the looming World War that he was not yet able to gather a movement.⁶² However, once the horrors of the war lay behind them, so vividly suggesting the devastation of the biblical apocalypse, Riley was able to goad a more combative network of fellow Christians into action. Conservative Protestants of many varieties had long gathered for the annual Niagara Bible Conference, which itself generated an extensive network of prophecy conferences and Bible schools, where attendees weighed the signs of biblical predictions coming to pass. These gatherings became especially popular in the first few decades of the new century, after the Chautauqua retreats proved insufficiently hospitable to orthodox biblical Protestantism. At one such meeting in 1918, Riley successfully parlayed his popularity into the group’s willingness to prepare a “world conference

⁶⁰ Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” *The Watchman-Examiner* 8 (July 1, 1920), 834-835, quotation on 834; Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 36.

⁶¹ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 103-105, quotation on 104.

⁶² Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 51-53; Szasz, *Divided Mind of Protestant America*, 81-83.

on the fundamentals” of anti-modernist Christian faith, the first step in his mission to inspire and shape a fundamentalist empire.⁶³

The World Conference on the Fundamentals: Riley’s Institutional Stronghold

The first meeting of the World Conference on the Fundamentals of the Faith in 1919 was a substantial success, particularly in the way it launched Riley as the most influential architect of this groundswell of Protestant activism.⁶⁴ He had successfully channeled the energy of the prophecy conferences into a congress of 6,000 attendees committed to fighting modernist threats. Riley arranged for himself to be the event’s opening speaker, and chaired the most productive of the gathering’s five standing committees, which would organize and conduct a tour of many smaller conferences to bring their anti-modernist message to every corner of the United States and Canada. Riley’s leadership was particularly visible in the nine-point creed he had personally articulated for the nascent World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA):

- I. We believe in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as verbally inspired of God, and inerrant in the original writings, and that they are of supreme and final authority in faith and life.
- II. We believe in one God, eternally existing in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
- III. We believe that Jesus Christ was begotten by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, and is true God and true man.
- IV. We believe that man was created in the image of God, that he sinned and thereby incurred not only physical death, but also that spiritual death which is separation from God; and that all human beings are born with a sinful nature, and, in the case of those who reach moral responsibility, become sinners in thought, word, and deed.

⁶³ Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 51-53, 63-65; Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 27-38; Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 80-112, passim; Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 8-9, 11-12; Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, passim.

⁶⁴ Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” iii-iv, 131-143.

V. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures as a representative and substitutionary sacrifice; and that all that believe in Him are justified on the ground of His shed blood.

VI. We believe in the resurrection of the crucified body of our Lord, in His ascension into heaven, and in His present life there for us, as High Priest and Advocate.

VII. We believe in “that blessed hope,” the personal, premillennial and imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

VIII. We believe that all who receive by faith the Lord Jesus Christ are born again of the Holy Spirit and thereby become children of God.

IX. We believe in the bodily resurrection of the just and the unjust, the everlasting blessedness of the saved, and the everlasting, conscious punishment of the lost.⁶⁵

Particularly notable is that the official identity of this movement’s most active organization proceeded directly from the first point, belief in the inspired status and authority of the Bible. Riley was also directly responsible for the insertion of the seventh point about premillennialism; this doctrine was not representative of all conservative evangelicals, but he had made it one of the central tenets of the WCFA, rooted in the principle of accepting the Bible statements “at face value” rather than imposing specious historical or rationalistic interpretations. Baptist editor Curtis Lee Laws proposed in 1920 to call the swelling movement *Fundamentalism*, observing that they were unfairly described by the already-pejorative label *conservative*:

We here and now move that a new word be adopted to describe the men among us who insist that the landmarks shall not be removed.... We suggest that those who still cling to the great fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists.’... Fundamentalism is a protest against the rationalistic interpretation of Christianity which seeks to discredit supernaturalism.⁶⁶

Although many ancillary controversies would also arise in fundamentalist circles—most notably anti-evolutionism—Laws sought to limit their platform to this doctrinal emphasis on core tenets as a way of promoting a Christianity relevant to the modern age. Riley and the Association

⁶⁵ Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 37-45, 56, 61-88, quotation on 43-44.

⁶⁶ Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” quotation on 834.

would guide this movement to wield enormous influence over the American religious landscape until his 1929 resignation from the organization in its decline.⁶⁷

One particularly effective aspect of the WCFA was Riley's strategy for extending its activity and enthusiasm into considerably larger networks nationwide. As part of the 1919 conference, the conveners also established five standing committees, including the Committee on Bible Conferences which, under Riley's leadership, established local conferences on the model of the Chautauqua lecture circuit. Sponsored speakers traveled cross-country in three teams, including smaller towns in their tour of more than a hundred stops, connecting with local pastors and congregations to establish fundamentalist organizations in each location and broadcasting their activity through the regional newspapers. For the first time, especially in the South, many thousands of disaffected biblical purists experienced their belonging to a mass movement of like-minded Protestants. Even after the peak visibility of fundamentalism had passed at the national level, these permanent local associations persevered in insisting on their particular model of knowledge and its militant implementation.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 159-160; Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," 91-99, 264-306.

⁶⁸ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 42-44; Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 39-40; Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," 139-141; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., ed., *Controversy in the Twenties: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and Evolution* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1969), 17-19, 38-41; George E. Webb, *Evolution Controversy in America* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 70ff.; Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 36-37; William R. Glass, *Strangers in Zion: Fundamentalists in the South, 1900-1950* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 78-79.

The Pillars of a Fundamentalist Empire

Less influential but still significant were the other components of Riley's fundamentalist empire that disseminated his values and crusading spirit to laypeople. The Northwestern Bible and Missionary Training School began in 1902 in a classroom adjoining the chapel of the First Baptist Church, moving into a new building of its own in 1923. The Northwestern Evangelical Theological Seminary was established in 1935 to provide churches in the upper Midwest a supply of suitably orthodox clergy willing to serve rural congregations. More than 70 percent of the state's 125 Baptist churches were led by pastors trained at this school, promoting a style of ministry that was less distracted by modern scholarship and more committed to biblical rectitude. Lastly, the Northwestern College of Liberal Arts was founded in 1946, a year before Riley's death, by which time 700 students were in attendance at the three schools.⁶⁹ Riley's periodicals also extended the reach of his message to the far-flung homes of devoted followers. He inaugurated the Association's official periodical *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* (later *The Christian Fundamentalist*) in 1918, each issue featuring the WCFA seal—designed by Riley himself—and the pugnacious Midwestern tagline “Prairie fires are stopped by starting opposing fires to meet the on-rushing flames.”⁷⁰ *The Pilot* was created in 1920 as a monthly magazine to showcase the writings of Riley's students, and expanded to include the words of professional religious leaders, growing quickly to nationwide circulation. In addition to keeping alive Riley's commitment to biblical Protestantism untainted by modernist thought, these periodicals helped to advertise his schools far beyond the Midwest. Even after the WCFA had

⁶⁹ Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 83-107; Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 117-158.

⁷⁰ Introduced in *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 2:9 (1919), 168.

declined, these remaining institutions have continued to produce and encourage generations of Protestant leaders dedicated to Riley's aggressive defense of the traditional Bible worldview.⁷¹

While Riley was not the first to lay the ultimate blame for modernist threats on evolutionism, it was his aggressive and militant campaign for a single-issue enemy that most shaped the fundamentalist movement in the United States.⁷² As early as the first years of the twentieth century, he and other ultraconservative evangelical leaders, such as A. C. Dixon, were identifying evolutionary thought as one of the basic adversaries of a biblically orthodox America, chafing particularly at the claim that this developmental view applied to all creation, with no exceptions:

It may not have occurred to all that the theory of evolution and false theology are indissolubly linked together. But every scientist understands, as do also intelligent teachers of the Scriptures, that the theory of evolution is not simply a question of the origin of species; but, in its present-day application, proposes to account for everything material, from fire-mist to the perfected frame of the universe; everything animated, from the sterilized cell of lowest life to the Man of Nazareth; and everything moral, from the sensations of an amoeba to the sacred communion between God and man.⁷³

In *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, Riley insisted on his right to engage with the arguments of scientists, but declined to engage on their terms. This book's central argument was that higher biblical criticism was but one expression of a broader phenomenon of skeptical faithlessness, which also included the evolutionary worldview. Modern biblical interpretation violated the model of knowledge that Riley held and insisted upon, in which the only admissible natural

⁷¹ Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 79-142, passim; Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," 47, 78-79, 193-194; Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 40-51.

⁷² Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 6-7, 156-159.

⁷³ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 71-92, quotation on 72.

knowledge occurred in the inductive accumulation of direct observations – that is, the popular understanding of scientific method. He customarily invoked as evidence for this position a selective reading of the *Standard Dictionary*, where the popular meaning of *science* and *theory* could be construed such that evolutionism was no more than an unsupported speculation.⁷⁴ Noting that the history of science was littered with the corpses of disproven theories, he disingenuously urged readers to wait until scientific experts concluded that evolution was classified as certain fact. This model of knowledge would remain consistent throughout Riley's long and prolific career, with the one significant development being his strategic choice to condemn evolution as the ultimate source of all modern error and impiety.⁷⁵

The most prominent effort to turn the Christian disaffected against modern biblical interpretation also occurred at this point in Riley's rise to leadership. *The Fundamentals* was a series of collected essays in defense of traditional Protestant doctrine against the most pressing threats of the era. Sponsored by oil magnates Milton and Lyman Stewart between 1910 and 1915, these twelve small volumes boasted to have been mailed out free of charge to "every pastor, evangelist, missionary, theological professor, theological student, Sunday school superintendent, Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A. secretary in the English speaking world."⁷⁶ Of the ninety articles in *The Fundamentals*, nearly a third addressed the divine inspiration and intellectual integrity of the Bible and the threat posed by higher criticism, while only eight

⁷⁴ Funk, *Standard Dictionary*, s.vv. "science," "theory," 1598, 1871.

⁷⁵ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 19-20, 214-215; Amzi C. Dixon, *Evangelism Old and New: God's Search for Man in All Ages* (New York: American Tract Society, 1905), passim.

⁷⁶ "Foreword," *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, n.d.), I, 4.

explored evolutionary theory and other expressions of modernist thought and only in a relatively non-confrontational tone. Providing a broad sampling of the conservative Protestant literati at the time, this series marks the beginnings of a self-aware mass movement but also indicates that evolution had not yet been singled out in the 1910s as the central target for an extensive and aggressive crusade.⁷⁷

Although Riley remains underrepresented in the literature about the American anti-evolution controversy, he is often at least mentioned for his exceptional organizational ability, which helped a particular strain of fundamentalism and a particular model of knowledge to reach an extensive audience. An intellectual history lens seems to point to 1921-22 as the turning point when evolution became the target of his emerging movement; however, a social history approach locates signs of this development even earlier, in Riley's empire-building activity. One of the important functions of the prophecy and Bible conferences was to bring together like-minded Protestants from a variety of churches, and they used these gatherings to vent their shared frustration over the liberals and moderates in their denominations demanding compromise on contentious issues. Riley's own vexing experiences in the Northern Baptist Convention motivated him to begin consolidating influence and structural power as early as 1918. Circulating at the New York Prophetic Bible Conference, he began taking notes on organizational strategies, networking with potential financiers, and promoting interest in the prospect of a much larger gathering where disaffected Protestants could promote a conservative hard line without compromise. Although his choice of speakers for the following year's

⁷⁷ Webb, *Evolution Controversy in America*, 54-57, quotation on 55; Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 8-14, 22-33, passim; Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 38-47; Carter, "Message of the Higher Criticism," 62.

inauguration of the WCFA and selection of his own words for the opening address did not yet betray a particular focus on anti-evolutionism, the first glimmers were already visible that evolution might become a lightning rod around which such a crusade could be gathered.⁷⁸

Even as Riley enjoyed successful attendance and interest at the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) emerging from his planning, he continued to press his own denomination to stand against the liberals in their midst, but with disappointing results. More than 150 ultraconservative leaders in the Northern Baptist Convention published a call in a May, 1920 issue of *The Watchman-Examiner*, inviting their Baptist brethren to a conference immediately preceding the annual denominational assembly. The advertisement warned that their Christian faith was in grave danger from the “rising tide of liberalism and rationalism.”⁷⁹ As before, the dozen addresses at Riley’s event did not single out evolutionism but attacked it as merely one of several modernist threats, also including the watered-down faith of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue; the radical, scientific attitude toward the Bible; and the gospel of social betterment in place of individual spiritual salvation. Riley himself “threw a bombshell” into the conference with his lecture “Modernism in Baptist Schools,” hoping to destroy the tree of modern infidelity by attacking its pernicious roots in the miseducation of young adults.⁸⁰ As the conference was attended by self-selected Baptists who resented “soft-pedaling doctrinal

⁷⁸ Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 158-228; Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 39-58; *God Hath Spoken: Twenty-Five Addresses Delivered at the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals, May 25-June 1, 1919* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 36-37, passim.

⁷⁹ Curtis Lee Laws, “Introduction” and “Call to the Buffalo Conference,” in *Baptist Fundamentals: Being Addresses Delivered at the Pre-convention Conference at Buffalo, June 21 and 22, 1920* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1920), v-xii, quotation on ix.

⁸⁰ Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 52-61, quotation on 53.

differences and getting together by working together,” his urgent message and confrontational tone were not surprising. Lamenting that “many of the Baptist theological seminaries of the North are hot-beds of skepticism,” Riley singled out the liberal curricula and educators at Chicago and Crozer as examples of the irreligious poison that impressionable young Baptists were imbibing. He concluded dramatically, “The Samson of Modernism, blinded by theological fumes from Germany, would fain leave Christianity itself in utter collapse.”⁸¹ While the support for Riley’s message in the heat of the moment was encouraging, his subsequent repeated efforts to convince the Northern Baptist Convention to censure the denominational schools and to institute a Baptist creed were unsuccessful. As prepared as he was to mount an uncompromising campaign against modernism and its followers, the Baptist commitment to individual discernment and congregational autonomy was more powerful.⁸²

Although Riley continued to badger his denomination to eradicate the taint of modernism within their own ranks, the Northern Baptists would not sacrifice their non-creedal tradition to his adversarial practice of orthodoxy. The ultraconservatives were making the strategic error of demanding doctrinal purity in a movement that possessed no procedure to enforce such conformity. After a series of bitter defeats in the early 1920s, in which moderates refused to join him in denouncing their more liberal brethren, Riley fumed, “This is not a battle; it is a war from which there is no discharge.”⁸³ In this spirit, he refused to give up hope that he could convince

⁸¹ William Bell Riley, “Modernism in Baptist Schools,” in *Baptist Fundamentals*, 165-187, quotations on 178, 187.

⁸² Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 158-228.

⁸³ William Bell Riley, “Fundamentalism and Religious Racketeering,” *The Pilot* 19 (October 1938), 15-16, cited in Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 59.

the Convention to renounce the advances of modernism, even to the last years of his life.

Burning with frustration over his own denomination's ambivalence, Riley focused on his more accommodating audience in the WCFA, which exhibited no reluctance to insist on creeds and doctrinal purity.⁸⁴ Historian Ferenc Szasz notes that in 1921-22, Riley and the other leadership promoted an abrupt shift in the Association's focus, from soul-saving in the face of modernism to the very specific issue of evolutionism:

From then on their main effort was directed toward the passage of state laws to halt the teaching of evolution in tax-supported schools.... Within a short time, evolution came to be seen as the crux of the controversy between liberals and conservatives. It absorbed all other issues, much to the distress of the more moderate conservatives.⁸⁵

At their 1922 meeting, Riley acknowledged how thoroughly the fundamentalist movement had been a strategic creation, rather than a spontaneous emotional uprising. However, he was also careful not to make the campaign sound too much like the work of one man, instead humbly describing it as Providential, guided throughout by "certain irresistible forces." He wrote,

If ever a movement came in answer to prayer, it was this movement. And if ever a large company of men, living at remote distances from one another and laboring under varied circumstances, found themselves animated by a common conviction and pushed forward by a common impulse, it was that company who brought this Association to the birth, and who, without exception, abide as its leaders to this blessed hour.⁸⁶

Divinely guided or not, there was clearly a conscious choice at the 1922 convention to make evolutionism their basic adversary, evident in the many addresses then specifically attacking the

⁸⁴ Szasz, "Three Fundamentalists Leaders," 158ff.; Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 33-61; William Bell Riley, "Whipping Fundamentalists Leaders into Line," *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 5:2 (1923), 6-7, cited in Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 56.

⁸⁵ Szasz, *Divided Mind of Protestant America*, quotation on 107-108.

⁸⁶ William Bell Riley, "The Christian Fundamentals Movement: Its Battles, Its Achievements, Its Certain Victory," *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 5:1 (1922), 4-14, cited in Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 55.

theory as an illegitimate form of knowledge. Riley reported, “We increasingly realize that the whole menace in modernism exists in its having accepted Darwinism against Moses, and the evolutionary hypothesis against the inspired Word of God.”⁸⁷ Political scientist Michael Lienesch notes of this decision, “With critics of evolution beginning to attract attention in many churches, [Riley] saw antievolutionism as an issue that could bring together fundamentalists from across denominational lines.”⁸⁸

Riley’s strategies help to clarify the true extent of fundamentalist efforts to promote a particular model of knowledge in which modern scientific principles were inadmissible. With all of the historical attention already given the state of Tennessee in the 1925 Scopes trial, similar activity in other states remains underrepresented. In fact, Riley’s home state of Minnesota saw the most fervent efforts of the preacher and the WCFA and came the closest of any northern state to successfully banning the teaching of evolution in tax-supported schools. Gathering ministerial colleagues from several denominations as the Minnesota Anti-Evolution League, Riley conducted an organized campaign “to force the teachings of the evolutionary hypothesis from the public schools, and to lend all possible aid to evangelical denominations in ridding their schools of the same pseudo-science.”⁸⁹ Local ministers exerted pressure on school and university administrations to remove irreligious textbooks, explaining, “this assault upon the Bible and the

⁸⁷ William Bell Riley, “The Fourth Annual Convention of the Christian Fundamentalists,” *Christian Fundamentals in School and Church* 4 (October-December 1922), 14-15, cited in Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 48.

⁸⁸ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 45-46, 55, quotation on 46.

⁸⁹ Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” quotation on 205.

common faith of all Christian people is transgression of the law of religious liberty.”⁹⁰ Riley threatened to pursue a court injunction if the University did not remove the offending textbooks but was unable to bring about any changes. Instead, he resorted to goading professors and University administrators into public debates over whether evolution constituted scientific fact, nearly always winning over the crowd with his showboating style and sarcastic barbs. Convinced that scientific truth could be established by popular agreement against a tiny, overeducated elite, Riley blustered to the newspapers about the illegitimacy of the evolutionists’ position and the favoritism displayed by the university toward modernists and their destructive thought. After the disappointment of the Scopes trial, he continued to press for educational change through these public lectures, albeit to shrinking audiences who seemed less impressed by the preacher’s appeal to emotion and wit rather than to sound argument. In 1927, he helped to introduce a bill before Minnesota’s senators and representatives, and the measure’s sponsors spoke in at least 200 towns to stir up support, especially among the rural residents disaffected toward higher education and the state legislature. In response, university students and liberal clergy overwhelmingly and volubly opposed the bill and Riley’s attempt to determine scientific truth by legislation or popular vote. On March 9, 1927, the State Senate flatly rejected the bill, by a vote of 55 to 7, on the grounds of the separation of church and state.⁹¹

⁹⁰ *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 20, 1923, quotation on 7, cited in Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” 206.

⁹¹ Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” 204-216; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 268-281; Trollinger, “One Response to Modernity,” 83-88; Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 20-46.

Although five southern states (Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, Oklahoma, Tennessee) successfully passed their own laws in the mid-1920s, the Minnesota defeat defused what little energy the anti-evolution movement had maintained after the Scopes trial. The outsized influence of his home state's decision reveals how precariously the anti-evolution campaign had depended on Riley's sway and militancy, and how quickly the preacher's belligerent rigidity alienated the sympathetic colleagues and allies who might have persevered in his crusade. Additionally, this example suggests that the vague disaffection of rural Minnesotans could be channeled briefly into a compelling cause, but did not remain focused to sustain a mass movement, especially as the more urgent concerns of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and the threat of totalitarianism clamored for their attention. Although the Minnesota Anti-Evolution League had provided a template for other states to pursue their own lobbying and legislation, the political efficacy of campaigns against evolution dwindled rapidly and, with it, the fortunes of militant fundamentalism.⁹² Riley continued to insist that he and his colleagues were being willfully misrepresented as anti-intellectual and anti-science, but he was never able to recreate the original sense of urgency among his Protestant brethren, many of whom were simply weary of conflict.⁹³ The Methodist *Christian Advocate* sighed with relief and called this calming of the waters "a happy event for the Christian church," and laity in New Orleans regretted "the dragging of our beloved church into politics."⁹⁴

⁹² Szasz, "Fight against the Teaching of Evolution," 201-216; Szasz, "Three Fundamentalist Leaders," 268-281, 315-338; Trollinger, "One Response to Modernity," 83-106, passim; Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 19-46.

⁹³ William Bell Riley, "The Faith of the Fundamentalists," *Current History* 26 (June 1927), 434-440.

⁹⁴ "Laymen Protest Church Entrance in Party Politics," *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, October 7, 1928, cited in Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 195.

Riley's original motivation for selecting evolutionism as the single target of his fundamentalist campaign was apparently strategic, intending the theory to provide the most accessible "handle" with which to grasp the more unwieldy enemy of modernism. However, in practice he and his followers denounced this adversary on a number of levels, articulating a crusade capable of appealing to a variety of audiences. Not surprisingly, among his fellow Baptists Riley often offered a *biblical* argument: the theory of evolution posited a reality incompatible with the cosmology constructed around the Bible narrative. He regularly thus denounced it as "un-Christian," because it reduced the "personal heavenly Father" to an impersonal force; reduced Holy Scripture to a human book riddled with human errors; reduced trusting, unquestioning faith to ungenerous skepticism; and reduced the Ten Commandments to merely one ancient society's local customs to be casually disobeyed by others. To audiences of various evangelicals, particularly Baptists and Presbyterians divided internally over doctrinal purity, he frequently attacked the science at a *theological* level especially dear to them: evolutionism tempted humanity with a counter-religion to Christianity, in which their core doctrine of a spiritual rebirth became unnecessary. When he addressed the public, Riley regularly wielded a *political* argument, based in his success at framing evolutionary theory as a *de facto* counter-religion: if Christian doctrine couldn't be taught in tax-supported schools, then out of fairness evolutionism couldn't either. Also effective with general audiences was his *populist* argument that the veneration of elite expert knowledge was ultimately incompatible with democracy. Americans readily chafed at the suggestion that "a conspiracy of pale, scholarly professors" was enthroning themselves as educational aristocrats to decree, against the wishes of

the common people, what should and should not be taught in the nation's tax-supported schools.⁹⁵

The Place of Science and Elite Expertise in the Fundamentalist Cosmology

Despite this last argument against the authority unfairly granted the educated elite, fundamentalist leaders could not ignore the influential power of academic vocabulary and college degrees, leading Riley and others to resort to *scientific* arguments. This dissertation has already noted that Riley denounced the methodology of modern science in general, rhetoric also shared by many of his fundamentalist colleagues. Historian George Webb notes the intellectual chasm alienating these biblical anti-modernists:

Darwin and his followers had revolutionized science by doing far more than collecting data and organizing it into descriptive volumes. Attempting to explain rather than simply to classify, modern scientists needed to interpret as well as to record their data. Two entirely different scientific worldviews were thus represented, making it increasingly difficult for any coherent exchange to pass between them.⁹⁶

Historian of evangelicalism Mark Noll describes the model of knowledge advocated in fundamentalist circles as “misguided Baconianism”—not Baconian inductivism as Bacon or his contemporaries would have understood it, or as scientists in Riley's time understood it. Rather, the largely uncritical defense of the biblical narrative entailed a fundamentally different version of science, as demonstrated in the fundamentalists' selective use of core vocabulary, such as

⁹⁵ Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 71-92, passim; Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 44ff.; Szasz, “Three Fundamental Leaders,” 171-174; Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” 204; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 183; Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 30, 68-69, 96-97, 196-200.

⁹⁶ Webb, *Evolution Controversy in America*, 57-62, quotation on 57-58.

reason, evidence, and fact, diverging from their formal meaning in academic circles, and also different from how we commonly use these words today.⁹⁷

Marsden notes that even the most orthodox evangelicals regularly boasted of the centrality of rationality and empiricism to Protestant doctrine. Princeton's Archibald Alexander, for example, one of the most significant Presbyterian scholars in the first half of the nineteenth century, wrote, "Without reason there can be no religion: for in every step which we take, in examining the evidences of revelation, in interpreting its meaning, or in assenting to its doctrines, the exercise of this faculty is indispensable.... Truth and reason are so intimately connected that they can never with propriety be separated."⁹⁸ Alexander's student, Charles Hodge, undoubtedly the most important theologian at Princeton mid-century, repeated this claim: "Reason is necessarily presupposed in every revelation." However, these scholars did not use the term "reason" to mean that Protestant doctrine was based on rigorously coherent arguments, but that it was readily recognizable as true. Hodge used "evidence" in a similar manner, asserting, "faith without evidence is either irrational or impossible."⁹⁹ Presbyterian minister Lyman Beecher, the father of Henry Ward Beecher, agreed, "man cannot believe, or be obligated to believe, without evidence."¹⁰⁰ In this worldview, "evidence" meant the qualities that made a

⁹⁷ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 196-200, quotation on 197, 198-199.

⁹⁸ Marsden, "Collapse of American Evangelical Academia," 222, 238-239, quotation on 238; Archibald Alexander, *Evidences of the Authenticity, Inspiration, and Canonical Authority of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1836), 9-10.

⁹⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Faith*, vol. 1 (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Co., 1873), 10, 49, 53, quotations on 49, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Lyman Beecher, *Works, vol. 1: Lectures on Political Atheism and Kindred Subjects* (Boston: John P. Jewett & Company, 1852), quotation on 203.

thing immediately apparent to observers, and the more traditional evangelicals felt that the Bible already provided abundant evidence of its truth and authority, and therefore needed no additional external confirmation of its status as the inerrant Word of God. Furthermore, Riley regularly spoke contemptuously of modern “theories” and contrasted them with the “facts” of Love, Hope, and Faith.¹⁰¹ This strategy of invoking “science” against science also equipped the faithful with an argument for biblical inerrancy: the reverence for scriptural passages as the highest form of fact. The plain truth of the Bible could thus be justified with the vocabulary of science, if not the actual practice of scientific methods. In light of these examples, it is not surprising that evangelical leaders considered Protestant scriptural teachings as rigorous and authoritative as the sciences, or even more so. Hodge concluded, “The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science” – a professed emphasis on evidentialism that would eventually come to weaken the evangelical place in the American intellectual and religious landscape.¹⁰²

Additionally, fundamentalist spokesmen appealed to academic authority against evolutionary thought by emphasizing or even exaggerating their educational credentials.¹⁰³ Although practically no leader of the movement had attained any higher education in the sciences, the few with any certification made the most of it. From the 1920s onward, Riley and

¹⁰¹ Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 170-171.

¹⁰² Hodge, *Systematic Faith*, 10-11, quotation on 10; Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 45; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 169ff.; Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 231-232; Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 141-142; Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 212-221; Dyson Hague, “The History of the Higher Criticism,” in *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth* (Chicago: Testimony Publishing Company, 1910), 87-122.

¹⁰³ Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 88-107, 301, 342.

other leaders made much of evangelicals Harry Rimmer and George McCready Price, promoting them as scientific authorities opposed to evolutionism. Rimmer had briefly attended a homeopathic medical school, where he learned the “double jointed, twelve cylinder, knee-action words” that peppered his later lectures.¹⁰⁴ Price had attended some elementary courses in the sciences during a one-year program at a normal college. Both had received honorary degrees from evangelical or obscure schools, leading them to append titles such as D.D., Sc.D., and LL.D. to their names. Although scientific professionals dismissed these dilettantes and their arguments, the public was more easily convinced of their authority.¹⁰⁵

In addition to this multi-pronged attack on evolutionary teachings, Riley also benefited significantly from his alliance with populist politician and lecturer William Jennings Bryan. Soon after the WCFA had adopted evolutionism as its primary adversary in 1922, Riley’s Northwestern Bible and Missionary School sponsored Bryan to speak before an audience of 2,600 people in the morning and more than 9,000 in the afternoon, with hundreds of university students in a special section.¹⁰⁶ The former congressman, Secretary of State, and near-miss for the presidency of the United States, Bryan offered an additional approach to the campaign against evolutionary thought, a *sociopolitical* argument. Even secular audiences were swayed by the Great Commoner’s warning that evolutionism posed a threat to American society and, in fact, all civilization. A popular misunderstanding of evolutionary thought claimed that everything was

¹⁰⁴ Harry Rimmer, *The Harmony of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1936), quotation on 14; Edward B. Davis, “Introduction,” in Edward B. Davis, ed., *The Antievolution Pamphlets of Harry Rimmer* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1995), ix-xxviii.

¹⁰⁵ Webb, *Evolution Controversy in America*, 57-65; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalists Leaders,” 169-170.

¹⁰⁶ Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” 204ff.

necessarily constantly improving, contradicting Americans' clear everyday impression that the world around them was worsening. As fervent democrats, both Riley and Bryan insisted on the role of the people in the nation's decision-making about what knowledge should be taught in tax-supported schools. Bryan helped to articulate the dread and resentment felt by the general public and shaped the evolution controversy for the next decade on this dire message. Additionally, Bryan helped to bring significant national unity and appeal to a movement largely led by men with sectional experience and authority, who each preferred to campaign on his own terms. Although the history of the Scopes trial is already well documented elsewhere, Bryan's fruitful relationship with Riley helps to underscore how the selection of evolution as the single target of fundamentalism became a political juggernaut from which the religious movement was not able to extricate itself.¹⁰⁷

The Diffusion of the Fundamentalist Crusade

It is important to acknowledge that the choice of evolutionism as the WCFA's primary target was not an inevitable development. When Riley looked back on this decision from 1927, he described it as a straightforward and obvious course correction. However, the anti-evolution campaign was developed by disregarding a number of other heads on the hydra of modernism, and the Minnesota preacher's forceful leadership to narrow the focus of fundamentalism was not welcomed by all of his colleagues. Of course, at no point in the history of fundamentalism was it a homogenous movement, despite Riley's demands of doctrinal conformity. By 1923 a number

¹⁰⁷ Trollinger, *God's Empire*, 48ff.; Marty, *Modern American Religion*, 211; Szasz, *Divided Mind of Protestant America*, 108; Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 37-59; Riley, *Finality of the Higher Criticism*, 71-92, passim; Webb, *Evolution Controversy in America*, 57-91; C. Allyn Russell, "William Bell Riley: Architect of Fundamentalism," *Minnesota History* 43:1 (Spring 1972), 14-30, on 23, 26.

of growing divisions were already emerging about the priorities of the movement, including the decision to focus on this single aspect of the modernist threat. Southern Baptist pastor Lee Scarborough complained, “We are in great danger of being obsessed by anti-evolutionism. We must remember that we have other enemies of the truth besides evolution.”¹⁰⁸ By this time, however, Riley had already allied with Bryan and, as further evidence of the momentum of their single-issue collaboration, the pair were pulling the larger movement of fundamentalism along in their wake. Among the original leadership of the WCFA were the more moderate Baptists Curtis Lee Laws, Jasper Massee, and Frank Goodchild, who pressed for a less exclusionary stance and closer attention to the biblical fundamentals of their faith. Laws in particular availed himself of the pages of his *Watchman-Examiner* to call his militant brethren back to their original purpose of religious reform, acknowledging, “many Christians believe in some form of the development theory.... a purely scientific matter has for a time turned the fundamentalists away from their insistence on a pure theology which is their primary contention.”¹⁰⁹ The editor further lamented that the media sensation of the Scopes trial entrenched in the public’s minds the impression that the decision of the court had actually been a criticism of fundamentalism, rather than a ruling on the straightforward violation of a state statute. This concern about the movement’s misguided focus on a scientific theory was not limited to its inner circle of leaders; popular revivalist preacher Billy Sunday also insisted in his inimitable style on attacking the whole gamut of modernist evils threatening the nation: “this evolution hokum, this gland bunk, this protoplasm

¹⁰⁸ L. R. Scarborough, “A Four-Fold Answer to Modernism,” *Alabama Baptist*, July 2, 1925, 5, cited in Szasz, *Divided Mind of Protestant America*, 131-132.

¹⁰⁹ Curtis Lee Laws, “Editorial Notes and Comments,” *The Watchman-Examiner* (August 20, 1925), 1071; Curtis Lee Laws to John Roach Straton, January 12, 1924, Straton Manuscripts, cited in Szasz, “Three Fundamentalists Leaders,” 222-223.

chop suey, this ice water religion, this mental-disease crime stuff, this mortal-thought-instead-of-sin blah.”¹¹⁰ However, the force of persuasion from Riley and Bryan largely overrode these complaints. The Baptist preacher in particular insisted on full adherence to his position and brooked no compromise in any form of Christian evolutionism, insisting on what he described repeatedly as “The Unbridgeable Chasm of the Conflict.”¹¹¹

The behavior of the fundamentalist crusade in the late 1920s could be described as *diffusion*, in the sense of both dissipation and dispersal. The existing historiography is still dominated by interpretations such as that of Norman Furniss, who viewed the post-*Scopes* years as a decline, fueling the larger popular myth of science’s inexorable victory over religion.¹¹² However, other scholars have recognized the inadequacy of this description. Ferenc Szasz, for example, found reasons to describe this period as especially active and generative.¹¹³ Michael Lienesch looks to Sidney Tarrow’s model of political movements as “cycles of contention” to understand the apparent decline of fundamentalist impact on the national stage, and its momentum and energy directed into other, less prominent projects.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Billy Sunday, “Back to the Old-Time Religion,” *Collier’s* 76 (1926). quotation on 24, cited in Lienesch, 180.

¹¹¹ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 40, 57, 180; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 126, 158-162, 222-223, 363; Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 47ff.; Riley, *Christian Fundamentalist* 1 (September 1927), 8; Szasz, “Fight against the Teaching of Evolution,” 210; Mark A. Greene, “The Baptist Fundamentalists’ Case against Carleton, 1926-1928,” *Minnesota History* 52:1 (Spring 1990), 16-26; William Bell Riley, *Inspiration or Evolution* (Cleveland: Union Gospel Press, 1926), 150-151, 174, 253-272, quotation on 151.

¹¹² Norman F. Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy, 1918-1931* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1963), 178-81.

¹¹³ Szasz, *Divided Mind of Protestant America*, 136-138; Szasz, “Three Fundamentalist Leaders,” 264ff.

¹¹⁴ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 171-197; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 195-214.

A number of factors, external and internal to the movement, shaped the landscape across which fundamentalism diffused after the *Scopes* verdict. Of course, Bryan's death five days later was an especially hard blow to the campaign, as he had helped the anti-evolutionist crusade reach audiences worldwide, including a considerable number of non-fundamentalists. The followers of the Great Commoner readily interpreted his untimely death as martyrdom to their campaign, and fundamentalist leaders jockeyed for position to claim his mantle. However, none commanded the popularity Bryan had lent to the movement, and even Riley was forced to acknowledge, "Our judgment is that it will take a number of us, and at our best, to fill the place vacated by the fall of this magnificent thinker and leader."¹¹⁵

In truth, what apparent national unity Riley had been able to manufacture was dissolving in favor of more local efforts. In the mid-1920s, ultraconservatives had successfully brought about two dozen anti-evolution bills before state legislatures, although only a few were ratified. Significantly more successful was their activism at the local level, where school boards, libraries, and publishers could be pressured into suppressing evolutionist materials without the media attention of *Scopes*. These ongoing efforts frequently took on a more regional character and, like Riley, often explicitly adopted additional planks, such as anti-communism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, nativism, nationalism, and outright racism, describing evolution and all facets of modernism as the products of foreign forces intent on undermining American civilization. In general, the more local efforts relinquished the national movement's focus on evolution alone,

¹¹⁵ William Bell Riley, "William Jennings Bryan's Successor," *Christian Fundamentalism in School and Church* 7:5 (1925), 56-57, cited in Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 175.

returning instead to the broader list of modernist threats. However, conspicuously missing among these was modern biblical criticism, which was readily neglected as the purview of intellectual elites and university campuses now unwelcoming to religious militants. The Mississippi legislators who passed one of the few successful state laws recounted the threat as “infidels, agnostics, modernists, and all the mongrel forces that tend to destroy virtue, truth, and the institutions that have held together and promoted the welfare of the human race.”¹¹⁶ Another consequence of exchanging Riley’s authoritarian leadership for the vagaries of local control was that politicians began to back away from their earlier affiliations with antievolution activity, worried that their political reputations might suffer. A 1927 editorial in the *New Republic* treated the anti-evolution controversy as a momentary bout of insanity that was fortunately now shrinking away as an embarrassment; this article also noted the proliferation of pro-science and anti-fundamentalist efforts demanding better coverage of science news and adherence to scholarly rules of evidence and debate.¹¹⁷ Lastly, the scattered and embattled fundamentalist organizations were hit hard by the stock market collapse in 1929 and the Great Depression, which intensified their competition with one another for scarce resources.¹¹⁸

The impact of these various factors was significant in the diffusion of the fundamentalist crusade. Especially crucial from the perspective of this dissertation, however, was the decision

¹¹⁶ “Minority Report on H.B. no. 77,” *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Mississippi, 1926* (Jackson, MI: Herderman Brothers, 1926), 330-31, reprinted in Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 302-304, quotation on 303; Christopher K. Curtis, “Mississippi’s Anti-Evolution Law of 1926,” *Journal of Mississippi History* 48:1 (1986), 15-29.

¹¹⁷ “The Fundamentalists Retreat,” *New Republic* 52 (1927), 8-9.

¹¹⁸ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 173-196.

by the movement's leadership – prominently Riley – to focus their efforts on evolutionism rather than on biblical criticism or other modernist developments, which had the effect of painting themselves into a corner. Historian of religion C. Allyn Russell reflects, “the identification of the WCFA with the evolution controversy tended to damage its long-range effectiveness. When the crisis over Darwin's hypothesis had passed, there appeared to be no unifying cause (although an attempt was made to draw the members together through prayer for a world-wide revival).”¹¹⁹ British philosopher Stephen Toulmin has noted the historical pattern of Christian thinkers committing too enthusiastically to an external principle in the natural sciences, which they had done with Aristotle and Newton, and then again in the early nineteenth century with Francis Bacon.¹²⁰ As in the past, these enthusiasts of natural knowledge yoked their religious beliefs to physical evidences, but their commitment had assumed an unchanging order and an unchanging method. As new entities and new scientific principles came to light, it was unclear whether this commitment could be maintained.¹²¹

An important development in the reactionary Protestant response to modern biblical criticism and evolutionary thought was the widespread stereotype of fundamentalists as anti-scientific and anti-intellectual. Historian David Livingstone observes, “In the popular mind, if indeed not in historical scholarship, fundamentalism is widely regarded as synonymous with an obscurantist attitude to culture in general and to science in particular. That these charges are not

¹¹⁹ Russell, “William Bell Riley,” 14-30, quotation on 26.

¹²⁰ Stephen Toulmin, “The Historicization of Natural Science: Its Implications for Theology,” in *Paradigm Change in Theology: A Symposium for the Future*, eds. Hans Küng and David Tracy (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 234-237.

¹²¹ Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, 197-208.

without foundation is evident.”¹²² This regressive reputation among scholars and the public alike left fundamentalists increasingly unwelcome in the worlds of secular higher education, modern science, and moderate Christianity, reducing considerably their access to debates over the soundness of scientific biblical criticism. This estrangement has continued well beyond the timeline of this dissertation. In place of these mainstream networks that conservative Protestants once dominated, fundamentalism maintained a lasting social location where anti-modernists could support one another in their insistence that they were not anti-science, even as they explicitly rejected modern science and its logical conclusions from their cosmology.¹²³

The evangelical Protestants who established the fundamentalist movement had not generally opposed scholarly rigor or methods, although many were unwilling to embrace the conclusions. Canadian rector Dyson Hague, for example, expressed the distinction between responsible, constructive criticism and the impious, destructive varieties, mostly exported from German unbelievers. In his essay “The History of the Higher Criticism” in the first volume of *The Fundamentals*, Hague argued that the best defense against the overreaching of modern biblical scholars was “the most fearless search for truth” through more sober and more scientific research: “No one wants to put the Bible in a glass case. It is the duty of every Christian who belongs to the noble army of truth-lovers to test all things and to hold fast that which is good.”¹²⁴

¹²² Livingstone, “B. B. Warfield,” 69-83, quotation on 69.

¹²³ George Marsden, “Fundamentalism as an American Phenomenon, A Comparison with English Evangelicalism,” *Church History*, 46:2 (June 1977), 215-232, on 226-230; Ernest R. Sandeen, “Fundamentalism and American Identity,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 387 (January 1970), 56-65.

¹²⁴ Hague, “History of the Higher Criticism,” quotation on 115.

Another essayist in the collection, James Reeve of Southwestern Theological Seminary, predicted, “Conservative scholarship is rapidly awakening, and, while it will retain the legitimate use of the invaluable historical method, will sweep from the field most of the speculations of the critics.”¹²⁵ The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate criticism of the Bible lay in the fact that the former left the traditional doctrines of biblical Christianity unchanged, or as Hague insisted, “the old-fashioned views are as scholarly as they are Scriptural.”¹²⁶ In the late nineteenth century, traditionalist Protestants could still even claim a few reputable scientists in support of their arguments, such as Louis Agassiz in their attacks on Darwinian evolution.¹²⁷ *The Fundamentals* also contained the words of authors who, while perhaps not explicitly hostile toward advanced education and rigorous thought, claimed to speak for the “less learned folk,” whom they suggested might even be more enlightened than celebrated scholars: “Verily, the world through its wisdom knows not God. The true meaning of ‘Grace’ is hidden from the wise and prudent, and is revealed to babes.”¹²⁸ Overall, the range of positions expressed in *The Fundamentals* and other early fundamentalist writings was considerably broader than the later platform of the organized movement, including even a few essays favorable toward evolutionism.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Reeve, “My Personal Experience,” 98-118, quotation on 112.

¹²⁶ Hague, “History of the Higher Criticism,” quotation on 115.

¹²⁷ Numbers, *The Creationists*, 7.

¹²⁸ Thomas Spurgeon, “Salvation by Grace,” in *The Fundamentals* v.9, 48-65, quotation on 48.

¹²⁹ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 18-19; Livingstone, “B. B. Warfield,” 83.

Although the coverage of *Scopes* in 1925 drew popular attention to the intersection of science and religion to a degree never before seen in the American media, the stereotyping of fundamentalists as obscurantist preceded that famous trial and its sensationalist reporting.¹³⁰ During the early 1920s, North Carolina's fundamentalists had launched a number of protests against the state's colleges, which they felt were promoting irreligiosity and reckless disrespect for traditional sources of authority. Advocates of academic freedom in higher education increasingly framed their arguments in terms of intellectual progress versus destructive ignorance, a strategy that successfully defeated a number of legal attempts to bar impious ideas. The most prominent battle for control took place at the progressive Baptist school Wake Forest College, where fundamentalists had relentlessly attacked liberal policies for years before *Scopes*. College president William Poteat, a biologist and the first layman president in the school's history, struck back at his critics in a lecture series in early 1925, dismissing them as "earnest but misguided men" plying their ideas "in the wrong century."¹³¹ Liberal Baptists at the state convention later that year used even stronger language, describing their fundamentalist brethren as "violent," "ignorant," and "intemperate and bitter."¹³² Poteat further reinforced the vocabulary of their polarized positions by insisting that Wake Forest's progressive policies represented the Baptists' only means to "respectability" in the New South. Emerging as the populist flagbearer for the fundamentalists, William Jennings Bryan engaged in such flagrant obscurantism that he

¹³⁰ Ronald L. Numbers, *Science and Christianity in Pulpit and Pew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35.

¹³¹ William Poteat, *Can a Man Be a Christian To-day?* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), quotation on 35.

¹³² Paul Anthony Sanchez, "Christianity at the Crossroads: William Louis Poteat and Liberal Religion in the Baptist South" (Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), *passim*, cited in Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 124.

presented a particularly easy target for critics. In 1921 the *Christian Century* printed an editorial by Congregationalist pastor Lloyd Douglas mocking Bryan's antievolution campaign as ignorant and intellectually immoral, and noted popular preachers regularly appeared in the *New York Times*, criticizing the populist's ideas as an embarrassment. Bryan did not improve his reputation by insisting on his academic qualifications with a recitation of his seven doctoral degrees, all honorary.¹³³

The *Scopes* trial underscored these stereotypes, and the media embellished and spread them to the everyday American reader. By 1925, Riley and other leaders had narrowed the focus of the fundamentalist movement almost exclusively to anti-evolutionism, which the court testimony could easily represent as anti-science. Historian Adam Laats describes the impact of the tribunal:

It turned out to be the biggest single event that brought the fundamentalist movement to the attention of the American public. Many outside observers equated their stereotypes about rural Tennessee culture with the antievolution movement. In spite of sustained efforts by some fundamentalists to build a fundamentalist movement that included a relatively wide coalition, the attention of the *Scopes* trial allowed outsiders, liberals, and even some fundamentalists to promote an image of rural, populist, anti-intellectual traditionalism as coequal with the entire fundamentalist movement.¹³⁴

The *New York Times* similarly depicted Bryan as a proxy for all of fundamentalism and even for all of conservative Protestantism, noting his "admissions of ignorance of things boys and girls learn in high school, his floundering confessions that he knew practically nothing of geology,

¹³³ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 111-113; Adam Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education in the Scopes Era: God, Darwin, and the Roots of America's Culture Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 121-138; Willard B. Gatewood, Jr., *Preachers, Pedagogues and Politicians: The Evolution Controversy in North Carolina, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 175, cited in Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 124n15.

¹³⁴ Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, quotation on 28-29.

biology, philology, little of comparative religion, and little even of ancient history.”¹³⁵ Laats also observes that it was these embellished accounts that were later preserved in both academic and popular histories. For example, one history from the 1950s explained, “Equally obvious with violence as a characteristic of the [Fundamentalist] movement was ignorance, even illiteracy.”¹³⁶

Defenders of science were initially slow to organize a response to the apparent anti-intellectualism of fundamentalists, but they eventually treated it as a call to arms. Contrary to popular misunderstanding, the nation’s educated elite did not view the outcome of *Scopes* as a clear victory. Although newspaper editorials provided widely divergent accounts of the trial, in general they viewed the event as inconclusive and suspected that the debates over evolution would only continue.¹³⁷ Three months after the verdict and the Great Commoner’s death, journalist H. L. Mencken mocked the hygiene and intelligence of the “gaping primates” and “half-wits” of Dayton, and warned of the stubborn momentum of ignorance there and elsewhere, “The evil that men do lives after them. Bryan, in his malice, started something that it will not be easy to stop.”¹³⁸ Evolutionists employed similar descriptions as they combated reactionary education bills state by state, dismissing the fundamentalists and their efforts as anti-intellectual,

¹³⁵ “Big Crowd Watches Trial Under Trees,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1925, quotation on 1.

¹³⁶ Furniss, *The Fundamentalist Controversy*, quotation on 38.

¹³⁷ Edward J. Larson, “That the Scopes Trial Ended in Defeat for Antievolutionism,” in *Galileo Goes to Jail and Other Myths about Science and Religion*, ed. Ronald L. Numbers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 178-186, on 185.

¹³⁸ H. L. Mencken, “Editorial,” *American Mercury* 6 (1925), quotations on 158-160; Ferenc Morton Szasz, “The Scopes Trial in Perspective,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 30:3 (Fall 1971), 288-98, on 296-297.

fanatical, and uncultured.¹³⁹ Science writer Maynard Shipley, organizer of the Science League in the early 1920s, issued a call to arms in his 1927 book *The War on Modern Science*:

The forces of obscurantism in the United States are in open revolt!

More than twenty-five millions of men and women, with ballot in hand, have declared war on modern science. Centering their attacks for the moment on evolution, the keystone in the arch of our modern educational edifice, the armies of ignorance are being organized, literally by the millions, for a combined political assault on modern science. For the first time in our history, organized knowledge has come into open conflict with organized ignorance.¹⁴⁰

Popular mainstream media readily disseminated the dramatic claims of scientific defenders, as well as the increasingly common understanding of fundamentalists as the enemies of knowledge, particularly of science.¹⁴¹

This unflattering stereotype was not helped by fundamentalists who accepted the label or even boasted of it. In addition to the narrowed focus on antievolutionism insisted upon by Riley and other leaders, the widespread stereotyping also inclined them to adopt a narrowed public image as populist, proudly aggressive defenders of traditional America, and it was difficult to avoid the additional associations of backwardness and obscurantism. George Marsden described this process as appearing as if “the movement began in reality to conform to its popular image. The more ridiculous it was made to appear, the more genuinely ridiculous it was likely to become.”¹⁴² For example, fundamentalist leaders criticized the specialization of modern

¹³⁹ Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 119-120.

¹⁴⁰ Maynard Shipley, “The Superiority of Science,” from *The War on Modern Science: A Short History of the Fundamentalist Attacks on Evolution and Modernism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), excerpted in Gatewood, *Controversy in the Twenties*, 175-178, quotation on 175-176.

¹⁴¹ Larson, *Summer for the Gods*, 206.

¹⁴² Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 190-191, quotation on 191.

academic professions as an effort to “overthrow the Christian church and Christian civilization” by allowing educators and scholars to impersonate self-directed intellectual authorities, rather than as the taxpayers’ “hired man.”¹⁴³ They especially resented the claim that only disciplinary specialists were welcome to debate the merits of evolutionism; explained John Porter of the Anti-Evolution League, “Americans do not take kindly to snobs, either in politics, social life, religion or intellectual culture.”¹⁴⁴ Mississippi firebrand T. T. Martin scoffed at teachers who insisted on their academic freedom: “Ah! Sissie! You have played the high-brow long enough. Now stand up and take your medicine.”¹⁴⁵ A spirit of vindictiveness regularly pervaded fundamentalist campaigns, strengthening the public’s impression that the purported defense of the Bible was actually resentment toward advanced education and intellectuals. Additionally, colorful peripheral movements combined antievolutionism with other objectives, such as antisemitism and racial segregation, and neither the popular media nor the average reader cared much about the distinction between splinter groups and the main body of fundamentalism. One such group, the fascistic Defenders of the Christian Faith, proclaimed their mission to “save as many as possible from Satan’s grip, who is working as an ‘angel of light,’ appearing in the form of so-called ‘higher intelligence.’”¹⁴⁶ Their zealous, even paranoid, proclamations contributed to the negative reputation of fundamentalism as a whole.

¹⁴³ Michael Lienesch, “Abandoning Evolution: The Forgotten History of Antievolution Activism and the Transformation of American Social Science,” *Isis* 103 (2012), 687-709, on 704; Lawrence W. Levine, *Defender of the Faith: William Jennings Bryan, the Last Decade, 1915-1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), on 353-354.

¹⁴⁴ [J. W. Porter], “Have We a Right to Criticise Evolution?” *Western Recorder* (November 9, 1922), 11, cited in Lienesch, “Abandoning Evolution,” 704.

¹⁴⁵ T. T. Martin, *Hell and the High Schools: Christ or Evolution Which?* (Kansas City, Mo.: Western Baptist Publishing Co., 1923), 14, cited in Lienesch, “Abandoning Evolution,” 704.

¹⁴⁶ Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 26, 107-109, 159 quotation on 109.

The entrenched schism developing between fundamentalists and higher education, modern science, and mainstream American Christianity was the handiwork of both sides of the conflict. As has been noted above, reactionary antievolutionists did their part by hounding educators and college presidents who allowed evolutionism to be taught in their classrooms. Some professors also went on the offensive in addressing the evolution controversy in an imprudent or even belligerent manner. For example, at the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro, economist Albert Keister told his students that accepting evolution “forced the person to hold that account of creation in the Book of Genesis was not literally true but only the attempt of a people to explain a mystery of life in a pre-scientific age, hence a form of mythology,” prompting community members to call for his removal.¹⁴⁷ Some fundamentalists attempted to bridge this divide by accommodating both a devout biblical Protestantism and serious intellectual aspirations. Members of the League of Evangelical Students at Princeton Seminary, for example, called for a “constructive” form of evangelicalism that could overcome the stereotypes of biblical purism as “narrow-minded, bigoted, intolerant, or even unchristian.”¹⁴⁸ However, their earnest efforts in at least thirty-five chapters were insufficient to overcome the widespread conviction of fundamentalists as intrinsically anti-intellectual. As the movement under Riley’s leadership constricted itself into a more restrictive and homogenous community of belief, its more ambivalent or moderate members drifted away without changing their basic

¹⁴⁷ “Albert S. Keister (d. 1974),” *Encyclopedia of UNCG History*, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, accessed December 27, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.wp.uncg.edu/albert-keister/>.

¹⁴⁸ J. G. Vos, “The Spirit of Error,” *The Evangelical Student* 2 (October 1926), 7, cited in Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 128-129.

convictions, and felt less welcome in public or political campaigns calling for a ban of evolutionary teachings.¹⁴⁹

Once fundamentalists had painted themselves into a corner by committing their movement nearly entirely to antievolutionism, many observers assumed that they would retract their purist position and rejoin mainstream Protestantism. Rather, these religious separatists transformed their campaign into a stable subculture, providing an abiding social location for other renegades uninterested in compromise with modernism. One of the most convincing pieces of evidence that fundamentalism did not experience a “decline” after *Scopes* is the enormous development of institutions tailored to their worldview. Baptist preacher Vance Havner reassured his North Carolina congregation, “just because the great broadcast chains do not carry our message and because popular periodicals give us no space, it need not be deduced that we are bound for extinction.”¹⁵⁰ Historian of evangelicalism Joel Carpenter observes that fundamentalism after Riley’s sensationalist campaign was not to be found in denominations or prominent crusades, but in its popular movements.¹⁵¹ Fundamentalist education in particular experienced a significant boom, even before *Scopes*. Bible institutes, under no obligation to denominations, multiplied considerably and spread westward, providing reliably orthodox education to lay leaders and pastors alike. They established their own radio stations for the

¹⁴⁹ Gatewood, *Preachers, Pedagogues and Politicians*, 120, cited in Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 122; Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 175-176ff.

¹⁵⁰ Vance Havner, “Come and See—The Road to Certainty,” *Moody Bible Institute Monthly* 34 (January 1934), quotation on 211, cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 16.

¹⁵¹ Joel A. Carpenter, “Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942,” *Church History* 49:1 (March 1980), 62-75; Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 16.

purpose of transmitting worship services, Bible lectures, and prayer groups without the pressure to include more moderate movements. Fundamentalist summer camps combined the study of Scripture with recreation, similar to the Chautauqua institutes.¹⁵² A proliferation of conferences also provided biblical purists with regular contact with kindred spirits, and the editor of the *Sunday School Times* described summer Bible gatherings as “one of the most powerful factors in the spiritual life of the church.”¹⁵³ Historian of American studies Niels Bjerre-Poulsen observes in this development of an enduring fundamentalist subculture the unavoidable polarity between doctrinal narrowness and desire reach more people’s lives:

The dilemma between personal salvation through strict separatism, and the commitment to spread the gospel and stem the tide of modernism through social action, has remained an unresolved tension in fundamentalism. The fundamentalists have founded their own institutions and professional organizations in order to withstand the lures of modern life.¹⁵⁴

Although their later development has involved swinging back and forth between these opposite inclinations, this response in the late 1920s and 1930s to withdraw into their own subculture meant that fundamentalists essentially abdicated their engagement with the issue of scientific biblical criticism.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Trollinger, *God’s Empire*, 83-84ff.

¹⁵³ “Why Attend a Summer Conference?” *Sunday School Times* (May 15, 1937), 348, cited in Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 23.

¹⁵⁴ Niels Bjerre-Poulsen, “The Transformation of the Fundamentalist Movement,” *American Studies in Scandinavia* 20 (1988), 91-103, on 95, 99.

¹⁵⁵ Laats, *Fundamentalism and Education*, 129-138.

The fundamentalist engagement with serious biblical scholarship dwindled considerably after about 1930, and this decline is significantly underrepresented in the historical literature.¹⁵⁶ In addition to withdrawing from battles over scriptural interpretation to develop their own subculture and infrastructure, their presence in scholarly circles was bled away by several additional developments, such that Mark Noll identifies this period as the “nadir” of conservative Bible research.¹⁵⁷ The momentum of higher criticism in the United States continued to follow the “scrupulous objectivity” of the German tradition of studying Scripture as if it were detached from the faith needs of the religious community, rather than the model of subordinating analysis to larger social concerns, more common in Britain.¹⁵⁸ Increasingly marginalized by these irreligious, iconoclastic values, the shrinking network of conservative evangelical academics resorted to collaboration with laymen who otherwise shared their convictions, including revivalists, whom these scholars had once disdained.¹⁵⁹ Although Congregationalists and Baptists had been important conservative allies around the turn of the twentieth century, they drifted away from academic debates over biblical criticism in the first few decades of the century; Noll adds, “much the same could also be said about the Holiness, Wesleyan, and Pentecostal communities, and about the European confessionalists in immigrant communities. In the first few decades of the century, the Presbyterians at Princeton flew the banner of conservative scholarship in the battlefields of the day pretty much by themselves.”¹⁶⁰ However,

¹⁵⁶ Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 172ff.; Szasz, “Scopes Trial in Perspective,” on 290.

¹⁵⁷ Bjerre-Poulsen, “Transformation of the Fundamentalist Movement,” 95-103; Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, quotation on 56.

¹⁵⁸ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, quotation on 33.

¹⁵⁹ Marsden, *Soul of the American University*, 236-262.

¹⁶⁰ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, quotation on 51.

even Princeton Theological Seminary was not immune to the larger trends in the American religious landscape, and reorganized itself in 1929 to better align with northern Presbyterianism, at which time J. Gresham Machen and other conservative outliers left to establish the more orthodox Westminster Theological Seminary. Of the remaining conservative Presbyterian biblical scholarship identified by Noll, little received any serious acknowledgement in academic circles. The one significant exception to this was the New Testament research published by Machen, and he soon busied himself in church politics rather than Scriptural studies. Although there were also a small number of conservative Protestants with an interest in studying science, incidentally involving themselves in debates over the Bible's claims—George McCready Price, Arthur I. Brown, and Harry Rimmer, for example—their scholarly contributions were negligible and tended to attract attention only within fundamentalist institutions.¹⁶¹

During this low point of conservative biblical scholarship, fundamentalists were also drawn to an important alternative tradition of biblical interpretation, described by some scholars as *post-critical*, meaning that its practitioners had simply abandoned the goal of rigorous analysis.¹⁶² Popularized especially by the Scofield Reference Bible, published in 1909 and 1917 by American theologian Cyrus I. Scofield, the principle of *dispensationalism* became a significant way for conservative Protestants to sidestep the issues of modernist criticism altogether.¹⁶³ The doctrine of dispensationalism teaches that, between the acts of creation and

¹⁶¹ Mark A. Noll, "Where We Are and How We Got Here," *Christianity Today* 50:10 (October 2006), 44.

¹⁶² John Barton, "Biblical Criticism and Interpretation I: Old Testament," in Alister E. McGrath, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 35-41, on 39-40.

¹⁶³ Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 57-61.

final judgment, God had shaped history into several distinct eras, divided by cosmic upheavals such as Noah's flood. This teaching appealed to reactionary Christians for a variety of reasons. First, God's guidance could be understood as developmental, becoming progressively more sophisticated as humanity's religious capacity matured. Second, dividing biblical history into epochs allowed believers to wave away many of the apparent contradictions in the Scripture texts and made the claim of strict biblical literalism easier to justify. Third, the progressive message suited the modern mindset that "newer is better" and quelled concerns that Christians were bound to the worldview of an ancient, primitive society. Fourth, the dispensationalist view exempted the Bible narratives from historical, philological, scientific, or rationalistic expectations, emphasizing instead the radically supernatural dimensions of God's relationship with creation. Fifth, a dispensationalist view went hand-in-glove with the culture of the Prophetic Bible conferences that had helped to cultivate early fundamentalism and helped believers make sense of a frightening world history in terms of prophesied events. Lastly, Scofield's Reference Bible was lavishly annotated and cross-referenced, appealing especially to ordinary Christians who remained skeptical of university scholars but fancied themselves scriptural experts. The workaround of dispensational theology affected the scholarly study of Scripture by, first, offering a popular alternative to serious engagement with the critical, scholarly study of the Bible and, second, inspiring generations of theological students, some of whom became professional specialists after the timeline of this dissertation. The emphasis on eschatology, or the end times, in the fundamentalism of the late twentieth century and evangelist figures such as Hal Lindsey owes its apocalyptic and ahistorical character to this dispensationalism.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 70-71.

The continuing activity of scientific biblical criticism from the 1930s onward involved a small network of progressive Protestant academics. Anglican priest and researcher John Barton reflects, “Biblical scholars seldom succeed in applying the text to the circumstances of their own day, and when they do, their work is often judged to be inadequate.”¹⁶⁵ While we may conclude that more liberal traditions of interpretation dominated the academic critical study of the Bible for a brief time, American laypeople generally found little satisfaction in their conclusions, and the popularizing efforts in Harper’s style dwindled. The activity of scientific biblical interpreters tended to undermine their own authority and effectiveness by decentering the Bible from Christian thought as they elevated secular sources of knowledge, such as the natural and social sciences.¹⁶⁶ Some modernist Protestants decided that biblical Christianity was largely or even completely incompatible with a scientific worldview and found succor in humanistic or secular communities and belief systems instead.¹⁶⁷ Others rendered the Bible narratives palatable with liberal post-critical interpretations, viewing them as poetry or archetypes or allegory. The victory of scientific biblical critics over the fundamentalist crusades was a Pyrrhic one, and American Christians floundered to articulate meaningful religious responses in light of the World Wars and the challenges of the modern world.

¹⁶⁵ Barton, “Bible Criticism and Interpretation,” quotation on 39.

¹⁶⁶ Henry Steele Commager, *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character since the 1880s* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 165.

¹⁶⁷ Robert Bellah *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 219-249.

Conclusion: The Selectively Scientific Interpretation of the Bible

Early analyses of American fundamentalism, such as that by Norman Furniss, depict the movement's trajectory as a dramatic rise and then, just as precipitous, a fall after the humiliation at the *Scopes* trial in 1925. Although these first historical narratives have been succeeded by more nuanced interpretations, their conclusions persist in a number of cultural truisms expressing what might be called *scientific triumphalism*, the assumption that the facts of science will assuredly eventually overcome the delusions of religion.

This chapter contributes to the increasing nuance in this narrative by recognizing religious positions and doctrine as potentially dynamic, rather than as a passive foil for the ever-progressing encroachment of science. Acknowledging factors internal to religion, in addition to external ones, adds considerable detail to the observation that the first wave of fundamentalist resistance was not in response to evolutionary science but to modern forms of biblical scholarship, including scientific biblical criticism. Viewed from the vantage of reactionary Protestants, we see how scholarly Bible interpretation did not provide a sustainable target for building a mass movement; the decision to shift to evolution as a new opponent was not in response to scientific activity but was rather an internal decision by a small circle of leaders, pressured primarily by Riley for a more accessible adversary. The fundamentalist focus on antievolutionism to the significant exclusion of other concerns seriously damaged the movement's long-range prospects for viability: after the most intense debates over evolution had passed, no other issue motivated members to the same degree, and the shortcomings of Riley's personality and style became more obvious. Of course, Riley was not alone in his leadership. The

movement was not monolithic, and its trajectory was not inevitable; a few significant voices opposed the direction of Riley's crusade, but to little avail.

Riley's rhetoric about the true enemy notwithstanding, in practice evolution was only one concern at stake. Fundamentalist arguments also targeted other modern scientific developments easily misunderstood by laypeople, including the use of hypotheses in developing scientific knowledge and the universal application of natural laws to all of existence, with no exception for the Bible or its claims. The movement's leaders insisted on limiting science to the level of popular understanding, disallowing all specialist knowledge because it conflicted with the *a priori* biblical commitments of their cosmology. Because science was, in their worldview, nothing more than direct observation, Riley insisted on their right to opine about scientific findings, rather than settle for segregated spheres of expertise.

The fundamentalist cosmology's circumscription of science allowed them to maintain that their approach to Bible interpretation was the truly scientific one. However, three additional factors served to marginalize them from the American discourse on biblical criticism. First, the fundamentalists were increasingly excluded from higher education, serious research, and mainstream Protestantism on the basis of their reputation as willfully anti-intellectual and particularly anti-science. Second, the development of post-critical interpretation of the Bible offered an alternative in which scriptural purists could avoid scholarly standards altogether. Lastly, the shift of the movement's energies to establishing a network of their own institutions provided them a sustainable and more hospitable social location. Once a believer assented to the axioms of a divinely created cosmos and Bible, fundamentalism offered a largely internally

consistent cosmology, with little need to compromise with the world of modernist thought and secularizing society.

Dissertation Conclusion

This dissertation has traced the history of scientific biblical criticism among American Protestants, from its arrival in the United States in the 1820s until the fundamentalist withdrawal from its debates in the 1930s. In presenting the origins and popularization of this idea, this project has argued that approaches to Bible interpretation compatible with scientific knowledge developed in the context of a new form of biblical Christianity. The narrative of scientific biblical criticism does not fit easily into the conventional history in which progressive, secularizing science is opposed by obscurantist, static religious doctrine. Rather, the proponents documented here offered an innovative form of reconciliation, in which the traditional concept of divinely authored, self-authenticating Scripture was reassessed as a collection of human writings, subject to the same external forces and criteria as any literature, and promising to provide guidance relevant to Christians in every age.

The narrative of Theodore Parker's career demonstrates that it wasn't enough for an enthusiastic scholar, particularly one from a theologically suspect denomination, to suggest the idea of scientific biblical criticism to his colleagues. The German provenance of such a concept, and its dissemination by a representative from the fringes of mainstream Protestantism, did not win it a lasting audience. Observant Protestant men of science, working from the vantage of their particular research projects, sought and popularized reinterpretations of the Genesis creation narrative to better accommodate their established scientific facts, and the success of these new understandings strengthened the popularity of the Protestant Congruence. What the British controversies accomplished was to disseminate widely, aided by the sensational reporting of

court cases and heresy tribunals, new tenets of biblical inspiration more compatible with the emerging modernist worldview, including the latest scientific developments. This doctrine of inspiration also entailed the idea that the Bible not be a special exception to our epistemology, but subject to the laws of nature and particularly the universality of evolutionary principles. Interestingly, the proponents and opponents of modernizing biblical criticism both tended to credit it to the external factor of evolutionary thought, rather than to a modified doctrine of inspiration within Christian thought.

The shifting culture of the academy and of the professional religious scholar marginalized the once dominant conservative Protestants from the world of research and elevated a new generation of evangelicals devoted to both biblical Christianity and modern science. The spread of this increasingly heterodox biblical interpretation to theological seminaries, congregations, and Sunday school classrooms generated an alarmed response. Ultraconservative religious leaders and discontented reactionaries, often at the margins of their denominations, found common cause in a new grassroots movement committed to what they considered the fundamental truths of Christianity. Buoyed by the first wave of mass media technologies, these “fundamentalists” effectively reached a broad range of Protestant laypeople anxious about the repercussions of modernist thought and culture as well as modern world warfare. Apparently for strategic reasons, the movement’s leadership shifted the focus of their campaign almost entirely from modern biblical interpretation to evolutionary thought, but were not able to maintain their initial urgency after the scientific debates over evolution had subsided. Fundamentalists withdrew almost completely from debates over biblical criticism, preferring post-critical interpretations of Scripture and building an institutional infrastructure that helped them endure as

a viable subculture. The shaping of scientific approaches to Bible study was left practically entirely to those whom we would now call liberal Protestants, whose decentering of Scripture within their epistemology ironically also worked to undermine their religious authority among American Christians.

Although the overworn trope of the warfare thesis has been discarded entirely by historians of science, a surprising number of American laypeople continue to assume that, for good or ill, religion has always functioned as the immovable object to science's unstoppable force. Looking back through the lenses of twenty-first-century America, particularly through the assumption of secularization, it is easy to overlook the efforts of Protestants who wanted to remain biblical Christians and commit to the methods and conclusions of the sciences. This dissertation draws attention to this underrepresented narrative by attending to the internal dynamics of Protestant belief and culture and following the development of scientific biblical criticism through the lenses of religious professionals, scientific professionals, and laypeople of varying intellectual loyalties. The view that emerges from this vantage is of the development of science in an overwhelmingly Protestant context, a society where Protestant thought and culture enjoyed high status and considerable authority, even in a number of non-religious spheres, including politics, education, and science. In this setting, science was able to infiltrate biblical thought by extending relatively uncontroversial religious claims at first, such as Herbert Spencer's theistic form of evolution. The Protestant Congruence gained traction as a popular assumption of the innate compatibility of science and the Bible, properly understood, but difficulties arose when core biblical teachings could not be reinterpreted to render them compatible—most intractably, the special creation of humanity. Like a houseplant outgrowing its

pot, the development of the sciences could not be easily accommodated within their original Protestant context, and biblical purists typically refused to admit hypothesizing, evolution, and the universality of the laws of nature.

The appeal of the Protestant Congruence was so strong that even those who balked at including the most modern claims of science nevertheless wished to be able to describe their biblical interpretation as “scientific.” Thus, two cosmologies emerged among American Protestants, each internally coherent: one treating scientific knowledge as essentially axiomatic and adapting Bible interpretations to fit, and the other holding to core scriptural teachings as inarguable and selectively citing scientific evidence. While it may be tempting to consider these as equivalent worldviews built on separate foundations, a claim made with increasing regularity by scientific creationists beginning in the 1960s, this false equivalency does not recognize their very different epistemologies. While the one cosmology recognized that new discoveries could overturn even foundational religious beliefs, the other only celebrated scientific facts that conformed with their existing doctrine. Thus, while the fundamentalists were happy to enjoy the fruits of scientific knowledge, including modern medicine, transportation, and communication, they would not accept the full complement of methods that had produced these benefits. Similarly, many biblical purists wished to be able to wield the same authority as scientific experts, but without conceding the same principles that had made that widespread prestige possible. With the rules of engagement established in this manner, the fundamentalists could not continue to participate significantly in American intellectual activity, because their special exception for the self-evidencing Bible was ultimately incompatible with critical engagement.

One additional aspect of the sometimes contentious relationship between scientific knowledge and biblical knowledge presents itself as a worthy future project. This dissertation only gestured toward the significant topic of the role of educated experts and expertise in a scientific democracy. The issue of expert authority had been a relatively minor point of contention in the nineteenth century, but the growing impact of popular engagement with biblical criticism made this controversy a likely outcome. The fundamentalists yoked their crusade in the 1920s to a popularized version of Common Sense thought, in which the ordinary Christian could debate the validity of evolutionism with as much authority as scientists. While this current project could not give sufficient attention to the disputed authority of the educated elite, the topic promises to further enrich our understanding of biblical Christianity in a modern, scientific society.¹

¹ Andrew Jewett, *Science, Democracy, and the American University: From the Civil War to the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 59-82, 108-116, 121-124, 143-147, 171-183ff.; Ferenc Szasz, *The Divided Mind of Protestant America* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), 131ff.; C. V. Dunn, "Mr. Bryan and His Critics," *Bible Champion* 29 (October 1923), 489-496, cited in Lienesch, *In the Beginning*, 277 n66.

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