

# The 29th Question and Beyond. . .

By Bill Robinson

An “Open Letter” has been circulated about the alleged consequences of what some have taught regarding Genesis One, especially at Florida College. I am not an alumnus of the school even though I have managed to preach the gospel for the past 27 years (tongue firmly planted in cheek). Furthermore, I am not an apologist for those named in the “Open Letter” or the college – its merits or demerits must be evaluated by each individual. What those accused have written in their defense has not only been articulated extremely well but it has been presented in an obvious spirit of “sweet reasonableness” (Phil. 4:5). For the record, I am personally acquainted with all of those named in the “Open Letter,” with the exception of one, and count them as friends.

Florida College is a human institution. Thus it exists apart from the church (universal and/or local) and from any other institution. The 50+ signers of the “Open Letter” are acting as if Florida College is amenable to the church when it is not even supported, much less promoted as part of the work of the church. If brethren ever become like the very thing they oppose then the “Open Letter” is a classic example of it. The very nature of the letter is an attempt to determine the boundaries of fellowship for Florida College as if there were boundaries of fellowship to be imposed on Florida College.

## Some Thoughts on Genesis One

If we use accepted rules of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) to properly understand the sacred text we will ask ourselves two fundamental questions: (1) when was Genesis written; (2) to whom was Genesis written. It is pretty safe to say it was written before Darwin. Therefore, Genesis was *not* written to answer Darwin’s General Theory of Evolution. Secondly, it was written to a people whose culture was rooted in polytheism (belief in many deities). For good reason then the Genesis writer is concerned with the “who” and “what” and not the “how” and “when.”

Let us be reminded that God did not use scientific language to explain how He created. To the contrary, he used language to which men could easily relate and understand. For instance, the Bible uses the terms rising and setting to describe what appears to happen to the sun in the early morning and late evening. However, that is not a scientific explanation of the facts, but it *is* a description

using language to which all men can relate. There is no question that God could have given a scientific explanation but few, if any, could relate to such language. Why does there appear to be a conflict between science and the Bible? As another has so eloquently pointed out, “only when the man of the Bible becomes unbiblical and/or the man of science becomes unscientific is there a conflict between science and the Bible.” Friends, the Bible is not a science textbook and we should not be trying to read our view of science back into the Bible. The Bible does not profess to contain all the truth about every discipline. However, it does profess to contain the *only* truth one needs to know in order to go to Heaven.

Genesis One is a recitation of the facts of creation set forth in language to which man could relate and understand, in order to identify the power of the true and living God (Jehovah) as distinct from the deities of the prevailing culture. From the first verse of Genesis One the emphasis is on “*Who*” (“In the beginning *God*. . .” - 1:1) and the very last verse emphasizes “*what*” (“*God saw everything He had made*. . .” - 1:32). It is not an explanation of “*how*” and “*when*.” The only sure commentary we have on the “*how*” and “*when*,” is learned from Hebrews 11:3, “*By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible*.” Beyond this limited but sufficient commentary given by the Holy Spirit - the “*how*” and “*when*” is a non- issue! No one knows when (at what point in time) God began His creative work but I do believe He did it and spoke it into existence (“*how*”). Make no mistake about it the allegations contained in the “Open Letter” are about “*how*” and “*when*.” Yet none of the accused believe anyone else but God could and did speak the world into existence. Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that *God is not bound by a space-time continuum*. If the creation is a miracle, then it not only defies human explanation but transcends it; especially in terms of time and space. Friends, there are many thought provoking questions regarding the “*how*” and the “*when*” of God’s creative acts but it is just as important for us to learn to stop where the Bible stops as it is to speak where the Bible speaks! Remember, God was writing to a people whose culture was awash in the acceptance of false deities but knew nothing of Darwin’s General Theory of Evolution.

Let us be clear about this matter, whatever view one takes on Genesis One it becomes the basis of his/her response when asked about the age of the earth. It is ines-

capable. Consequently, among brethren there is no unanimity of thought regarding the age of the earth. Even the framers and subsequent signers of the “Open Letter” recognize to some degree the question over the age of the earth *is* a “non-issue.” Thus, allowing for some differences to exist among brethren (perhaps, among themselves) on this issue. For why else would they write, “It should also be noted that the attempt to characterize the issues in this discussion [the open letter - br] as an ‘Age of the Earth’ question is misleading.” Therefore, if we allow for some differences among brethren to exist regarding the age of the earth then we must of necessity allow some room for differences in one’s interpretation of Genesis One because our differences over the age of the earth stem from that interpretation. Let us keep in mind, even if every human being could live a thousand years and each had the intellect of an Einstein, neither collectively nor individually could they “. . . find out the work of God from the beginning to the end” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). A friend of mine reminded me that brother John Clark used to say, “The mark of a mature man is the ability to live with some unanswered questions.” (The sound of that statement and knowing brother Clark it is probably a quote from Chesterton).

### The Nature of the Open Letter

It takes good men to stand up in the face of error and oppose it. Furthermore, we need to be put in remembrance that there are scoffers and false teachers present in the world and at work among God’s people. Truth in every area of life has been made to appear trivial, inconsequential and relative. And, quite frankly, Darwinism has provided the foundation for much of it. However, it is of utmost importance that if we are going to defend the truth successfully against error we must wage the battle NOT with carnal tactics but with that very truth – the sword of the Spirit – the word of God.

My greater concern is not the issue the “Open Letter” addresses, but rather with the appearance of the letter itself. Much of what was written in opposition to the infamous questionnaire of a few years ago needs to be revisited again upon this human document – the “Open Letter.” The questionnaire (though it was not so intended by its authors) was rightfully perceived by those who opposed it as an instrument of division. The questionnaire contained some Twenty-Eight Questions by which the soundness of men would be determined and therefore supported. Furthermore, the questionnaire, which was the product of a couple of men from different congregations, was sent by one or both of them to other congregations in different states with the encouragement to use it.

With regard to the “Open Letter” and the questionnaire think about this: The accused in the “Open Letter” could have passed the test of soundness proffered by the framers of the “Twenty-Eight Questions” at the time it was in circulation though the accused held their present view of Genesis One. I say that because no question regarding Genesis One was found among the Twenty-Eight Questions. Furthermore, it is interesting to note the names of the signatories because not even all of them are in agreement with each other now concerning other “dangerous religious errors” (i.e. divorce and remarriage, the deity of Christ, etc). How is that for irony?

Friends, the “Open Letter,” like the questionnaire before it was an instrument that undermined the all-sufficiency of the scripture whether intentional or not. Both instruments are trying to define the lines of fellowship and as such (whether intended or not) are attempts to say “line up” or else. Furthermore, the “Open Letter” like the questionnaire smacks of partyism. No one is opposed to asking questions any more than one is opposed to writing a reasoned and rational critique of another’s position. Yet this present issue over Genesis One was not even on the questionnaire which clearly shows the vacuum and waste of both space and energy created by men in their attempt to determine soundness apart from the Scriptures. How can we avoid the hypocrisy in opposing Goodpasture’s “yellow tag of quarantine” of the 1950’s if today we have hung our own yellow tag of quarantine under the name of a questionnaire or an “Open Letter”? Yes, we can become the very thing we most vehemently oppose if our zeal for the truth is not commensurate with our knowledge of the facts and truth in any controversy for we will be ruled by our emotions (e.g. the mob mentality involved in a lynching).

How can it be denied that the “Open Letter” contains the earmarks of a party’s creed? Especially, as one writer has defined the creeds of history: “A creed generally emphasizes the beliefs opposing those errors that the compilers of the creed think most dangerous at the time. The Creed of the council of Trent, which was drawn up by the Roman Catholics in the 1500’s, emphasized those beliefs that Roman Catholics and Protestants were arguing about most furiously at the time. The Nicene Creed, drawn up in the fourth century, is emphatic in affirming the Deity of Christ, since it is directed against the Arians, who denied that Christ was fully God. The Apostles’ Creed, drawn up in the first or second century, emphasizes the true Humanity, including the material body, of Jesus, since that is the

point that heretics of the time (Gnostics, Marcionites, and later Manicheans) denied” (<http://www.gty.org/~phil/creeds/apostles.htm>). Though many of the creeds contain much (if not all) truth; by their very nature creeds supplant the authority and undermine the all-sufficiency of the scripture.

Let me ask, does the fact that 50+ men signed and circulated the “Open Letter” far and wide mean that everyone must accede to their letter or else be disfellowshipped? How would the 50+ signatories answer that? You judge for yourself, for they write:

Jesus taught the doctrine of creation as literally true even as stated in Genesis One and 2. Since that is the “doctrine of Christ” on the matter one going beyond that doctrine or found receiving the teacher who goes beyond that doctrine is clearly condemned as being a participant in evil and devoid of God’s fellowship and sanction (2 John 9-11). . . .

We want to say it as kindly as possible, but say it we must: We view this teaching as false doctrine. Not only do we not agree with it, but we will have no part in tolerating it. It is our intention to fight it with all the force our powers to speak and write.


Friends, a group of 50+ men signing a pronouncement saying that certain men and those receiving them are clearly condemned and devoid of God’s fellowship and sanction, does not make it so. Furthermore, read the above quote again. Ask yourself if the authors and co-signers are merely expressing a concern or are they trying to coerce people? When I inquired of one editor, who was in agreement for the most part with the “Open Letter” why he had refused to sign it he replied, “I told them it looks too much like they are trying to gang up on them.” Indeed!

Again we quote from the “Open Letter”: “None of us seeks the destruction of these brethren [those named in the “Open Letter” – br] or any effort for truth. However, we do believe it essential for us to give an appropriate answer to what we consider a dangerous religious error.” Who is the “we?” The “Open Letter” in effect is saying because “we” (the 50+ signers) oppose the alleged error of what some man, or institution, teaches then the rest of us must submit to this dictum of the 50+ (see definition of creed above). If that is not so, then, for whom and/or to whom is the “we” giving an appropriate answer to what they “consider a dangerous error?” To the church? Universal? Local (which one)?

The author and their co-signers write: “It is our conviction that if the concepts mentioned above are ac-

cepted or tolerated among us, the stage will have been set for an ever progressing acceptance of an evolutionary explanation for all things.” Who is the “us” in this quotation? Is it just limited to the signatories of the “Open Letter” or to the local church where they preach? Does the “us” refer to the church universal or to other nearby local churches in the Tampa or Nashville area? Just who is the “us” that is subject to the conviction of these signatories? Furthermore, what makes their conviction authoritative? Is it the number, namely, that 50+ signatures have been garnered? Just where is the “we” (the 50+) headed and what stage is being set? Frankly, it is my opinion, that if this letter or some such questionnaire becomes a common practice then the stage has not only been set, but a trend will have been established pointing to the apostasy that led to councils, synods and creeds of the past. But, that is just MY opinion. However, there is a real concern with the very appearance of this document. Whatever the intent, it is saying we need something beyond the Bible to explicitly tell everyone what the lines of fellowship are and what questions are to be matters of fellowship. The authors and co-signers have made it clear, “we view this teaching as false doctrine. Not only do we not agree with it, but we will have no part in tolerating it.” Therefore, they are issuing a call for people to rally behind this letter and sign it. One website is currently soliciting people who visit the site to sign the “Open Letter.” It makes us wonder, if one refuses to sign it are they guilty of tolerating error? Are they suspect? It is indeed as another has said, “an unseemly way to line everyone up.”

The “Twenty-Eight Questions” were withdrawn because of strong opposition. Unfortunately, the principal authors never admitted such a document was wrong in its inception or use. As a result, in a conversation with one of the principal authors, I observed that if the tide of public opinion ever changed he would trot the questionnaire right back out and use it. Well we don’t have the questionnaire but we do have the 29th question and the principal authors of the “Twenty-Eight Questions” are co-signers of the “Open Letter.” Should we be surprised?

Brethren, we CAN do better than this. Brethren, we MUST do better than this! “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another” (Galatians 5:15). 

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