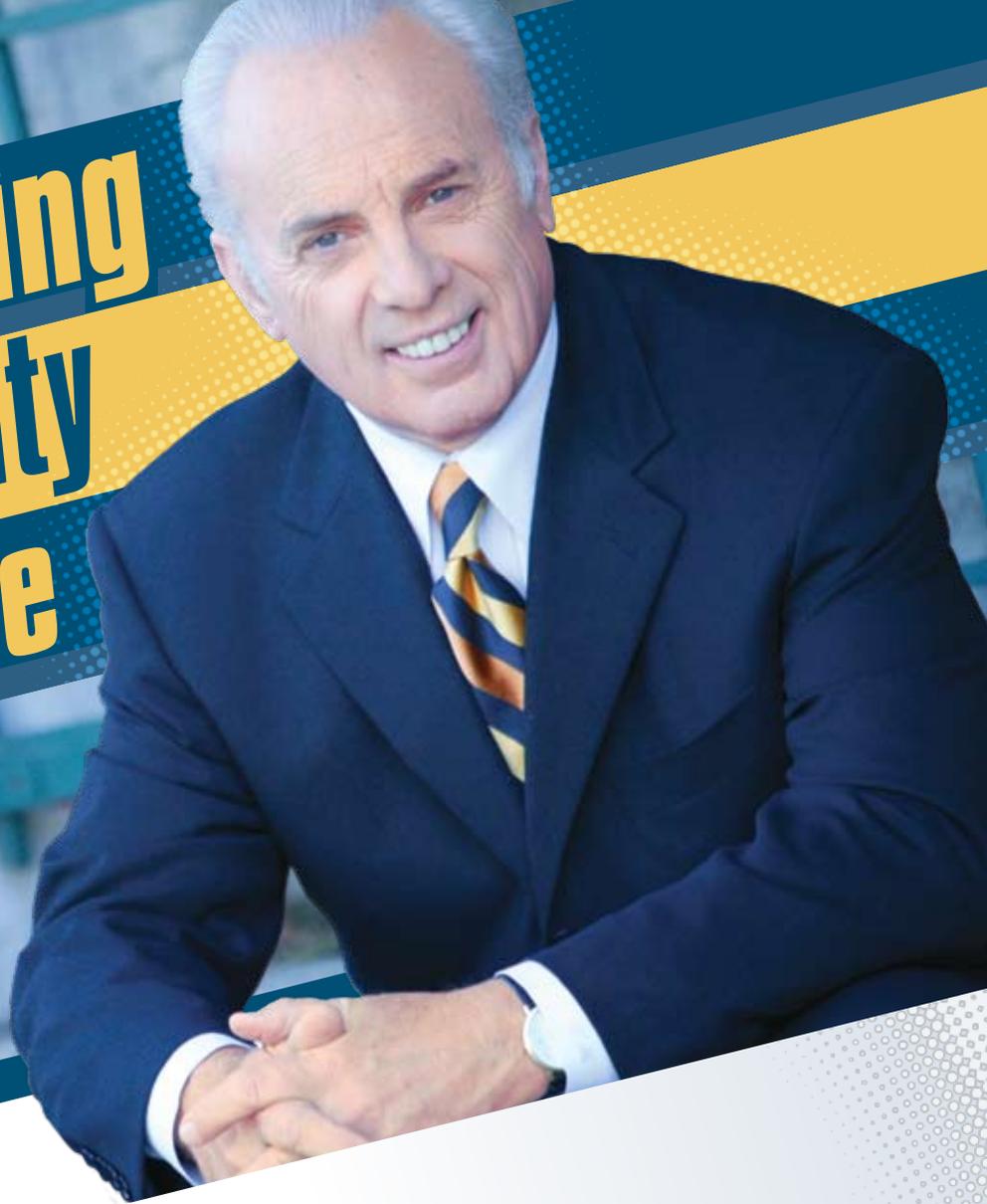


Defending the Authority of Scripture

Lael Weinberger
talks with leading
Bible expositor
John MacArthur



For over forty years of ministry, Dr John MacArthur has had a passion to proclaim the authority of Scripture. His ministry has reached out from Grace Community Church in California to an ever-growing audience around the world. The ministry has taken many forms: radio broadcasts, books, and the training at The Master's College and Seminary, where Dr MacArthur serves as president.

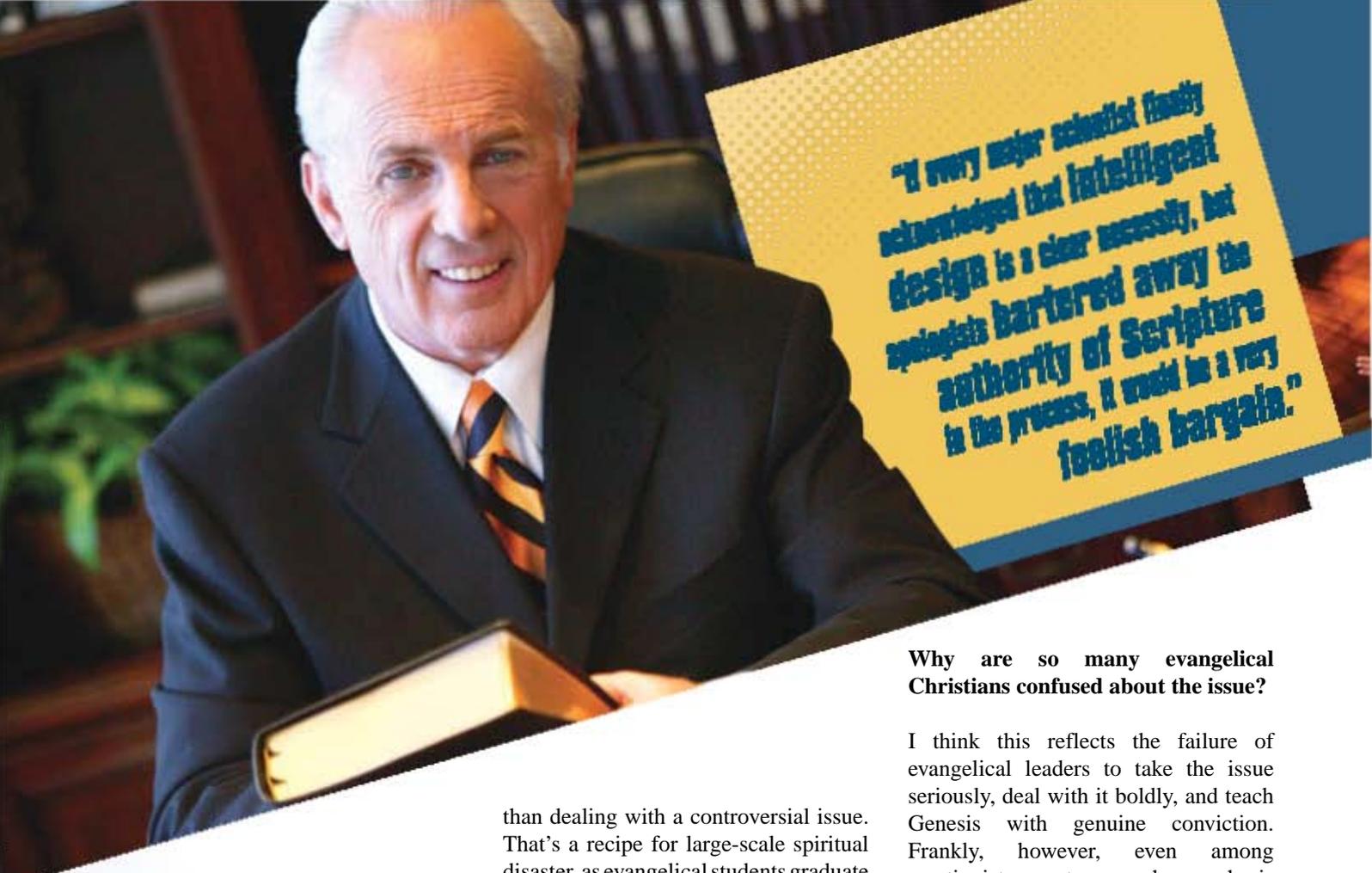
John recently shared his insights on the church, Genesis, and the interpretation of Scripture in an interview for *Creation* magazine.

Lael: Back in 2001, you published a book, *The Battle for the Beginning*, on the creation account in Genesis. Why?

John: During nearly two decades as president of The Master's College, I had been watching the erosion of belief in Genesis among the Christian colleges in the national Christian College association. Many of these were supposedly *conservative* in their biblical beliefs, but they were quietly, tacitly denying the authority of God's Word in exchange for worldly academic esteem. They were doing this by deliberately fudging on their interpretation of Genesis in order to increase their scholastic status. For many of them, abandoning the biblical account of creation proved to be a first step toward

relinquishing other key biblical and evangelical essentials. That's because the eventual crumbling of *all* biblical conviction is an inevitable byproduct of choosing to treat scientific theory as a higher authority than the plain teaching of Scripture. There were more than 100 schools in that coalition, and only a handful held to literal six-day creation.

By 1997, most evangelicals had begun to treat 6-day creationism as a wholly optional belief. In fact, many within the evangelical movement had become openly hostile to young-earth creationism. Some of the most outspoken enemies of a literal interpretation of Genesis 1-3 even today are considered sound evangelicals. These things ought not to be so.



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I am persuaded that the biblical account of creation is irreconcilable with macroevolutionary hypotheses. And I wanted to make that point with an exposition of the biblical text.

Where is the modern church in understanding the creation account?

Liberal churches embraced Darwinian theories and abandoned the authority of Scripture starting more than a century ago. Most evangelicals held the line on the Genesis account until some began to waver in the 1970s and '80s. The vast majority of rank-and-file believers in the US still hold to the literal interpretation of Genesis 1–3 in spite of the defection in Christian colleges and universities. But more and more evangelical institutions of higher learning have been shifting to the wrong side of the debate. Most Christian leaders (including some whose personal convictions about the origin of the universe are perfectly sound) remain silent about the issue and allow confusion to fester, rather

than dealing with a controversial issue. That's a recipe for large-scale spiritual disaster, as evangelical students graduate and populate churches, bringing with them the compromised views they were taught in Christian colleges.

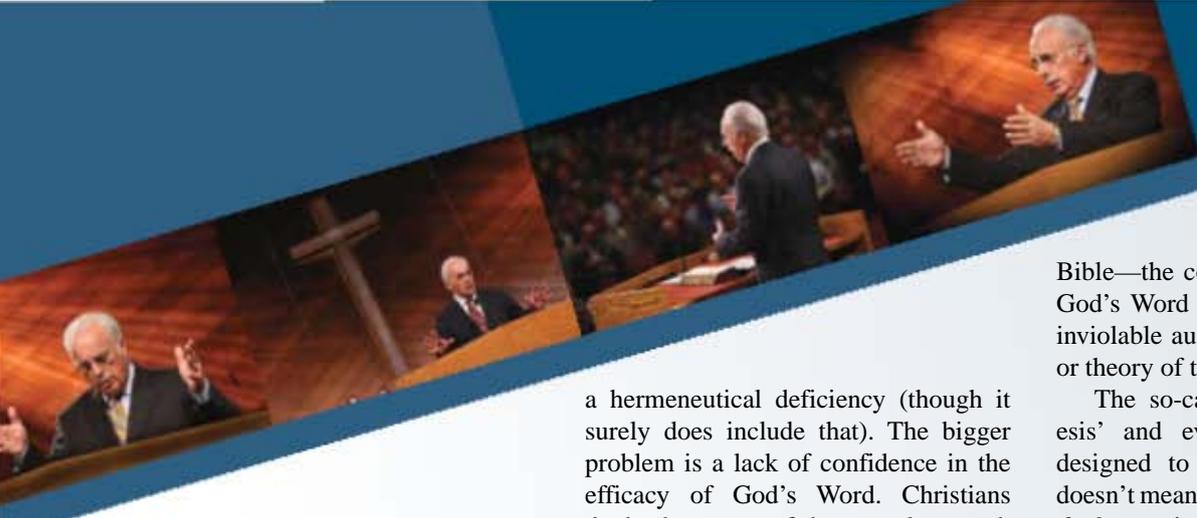
You have long taken a strong stand for the historicity of the Genesis creation account. What kind of reactions have you received from fellow evangelical Christians?

Actually, my personal interactions with other Christian leaders on biblical creationism have been encouraging and fruitful. Because I have based my stand on what the text of Scripture says, any Christians who want to challenge my stance would need to make their arguments from the text of Scripture—and that is impossible. My friend R.C. Sproul once embraced the 'framework hypothesis' and an old-earth interpretation of Genesis. He even endorsed one of Hugh Ross's books. But he announced a few years ago that, after a careful study of the Genesis text, he now believes in literal six-day creation.¹ I'm grateful for his courage, and I hope many others will follow his example.

Why are so many evangelical Christians confused about the issue?

I think this reflects the failure of evangelical leaders to take the issue seriously, deal with it boldly, and teach Genesis with genuine conviction. Frankly, however, even among creationists, not enough emphasis has been given to the actual text of Scripture. While the 'intelligent design' movement has gained a little bit of helpful ground, it is a serious mistake and a very bad tactic to shift the argument away from Scripture, making scientific, cosmological, and teleological arguments bear all the weight of our case. The effect has been a diminishing confidence in Scripture among evangelical creationists—some of whom now act as if they are embarrassed to cite Scripture as any kind of authority. Throughout the movement there seems to be a general unwillingness to draw any explicit connection between the intelligent Designer and the God of Scripture.² If every major scientist finally acknowledged that intelligent design is a clear necessity, but apologists bartered away the authority of Scripture in the process, it would be a very foolish bargain. It's a prospect that genuinely concerns me.

You have said that those who advocate an 'old earth' interpretation of Genesis have done so on an inconsistent and



faulty reading of Scripture. Why are so many Christians going this way?

It's a sinful tendency of the fallen human heart to crave worldly respect, and secular culture has been highly successful in making people think creation is unsophisticated, unscientific, and superstitious. In reality, nothing could be more absurd and superstitious than the belief that everything evolved out of nothing with no intelligent plan.

I do think American evangelicals have clearly become too comfortable with bending the rules of interpretation and playing games with the meaning of the text to reconcile Scripture with whatever is politically correct at the moment (or to achieve whatever other end they desire). You see this not only in the violence that is done by old-earthers to the plain sense of Genesis, but also in the way postmodern evangelicals reimagine so many difficult doctrines—the atonement, the role of women in church leadership, the biblical prohibition against homosexuality, and others.

Would you say that western Christians, including in the US, are hermeneutically illiterate?

Yes, and those who aren't hermeneutically illiterate are often hermeneutically inconsistent. The illiteracy is the fruit of church-growth philosophies that do everything to capture people's interest *except* proclaim and teach the Word of God. For decades evangelicals have been entertaining themselves and calling it worship. The church is now largely untaught and devoid of biblical conviction. It's not *merely*

a hermeneutical deficiency (though it surely does include that). The bigger problem is a lack of confidence in the efficacy of God's Word. Christians doubt the power of the gospel to reach unsaved people and change their hearts, so they have substituted other, artificial means of stimulating church growth. They have lost their confidence in the *authority* of Scripture as well. As a result, they are susceptible to the worldly lie that science and human reason are better judges of truth-claims than the Bible is.

What can we do about this?

What we need to do is get back to preaching and teaching the Scriptures in the corporate gatherings of God's people. God's written Word will not return void.

Many 'old-earth' evangelicals say that they're removing a stumbling block to faith by showing people that you can believe in the gospel without giving up evolution and billions of years. Is this really a slippery slope of reinterpreting Scripture to conform to naturalistic science?

Of course. The idea that getting in step with the latest scientific theories is 'best for evangelism' is a natural result of the loss of confidence in biblical authority. It is much worse than *merely* a slippery slope; it represents the abandonment of the most important aspect of faith in the

Bible—the conviction that Scripture is God's Word and that it's the ultimate, inviolable authority over every thought or theory of the human mind.

The so-called 'framework hypothesis' and every other literary trick designed to prove that Genesis 1–3 doesn't mean what it seems to say are all *de facto* rejections of the authority and perspicuity of Scripture. They represent a refusal to allow Scripture to mean what it plainly says, while relying on novel theories no one ever imagined before to explain the 'true' albeit *hidden* meaning of the text—as if no one unsophisticated enough to deconstruct the literary genre could possibly understand what God was trying to tell us. That is as wrong-headed as it is arrogant.

Evangelicals need to recover their biblical convictions and creationism, and believe what God has plainly said—whether or not worldly minds approve of it. We especially need to have confidence that the gospel (not clever arguments or human reason) is the power of God unto salvation. The salvation of every sinner is a sovereign miracle of God by the Word of truth (1 Peter 1:23); not a work of man by clever means (John 1:12–13).

Thank you, Dr MacArthur.

Notes

1. See creation.com/sproul.
2. Ed: Hence the release by CMI of the important book by Jonathan Sarfati: *By Design: The evidence for nature's Intelligent Designer—the God of the Bible*.

