

Creationist Funhouse, The Final Episode

No Rest for God

You would think, after all the work God did during the creation and the flood, he could retire and take it easy. But there is no rest for God! He is as busy now as he has ever been—in the weird world of creationist thinking.

STANLEY RICE

Many conservatives, including religious conservatives, believe there is no such thing as climate change, despite the fact that there is immense evidence that demonstrates it—evidence far beyond the scope of this article to summarize. They simply ignore the evidence and assume climate change must not be real.

Perhaps the most astonishing example of this rejection of evidence is by Oklahoma Senator Jim Inhofe. What is most interesting about him is the reason he rejects climate science. He actually said, during a press conference, that global warming *cannot* occur because God will not let it happen. He cites, as evidence, Genesis 8:24 in which, after the flood, God promises to never flood the earth again, and that the seasons such as summer and winter will never be interrupted as long as the earth exists.

You probably noticed right away that this verse does not say that the climate cannot or will not get warmer. Climate science does not claim that summer and winter will cease to exist; it just says that they will become warmer. Either Inhofe did not read the verse before citing it or he assumed that none of his followers would read it. And in that latter instance, he was probably right. Fundamentalists wave their Bibles in the air but rarely read them. (I have the survey data to prove it, but that is another story.)

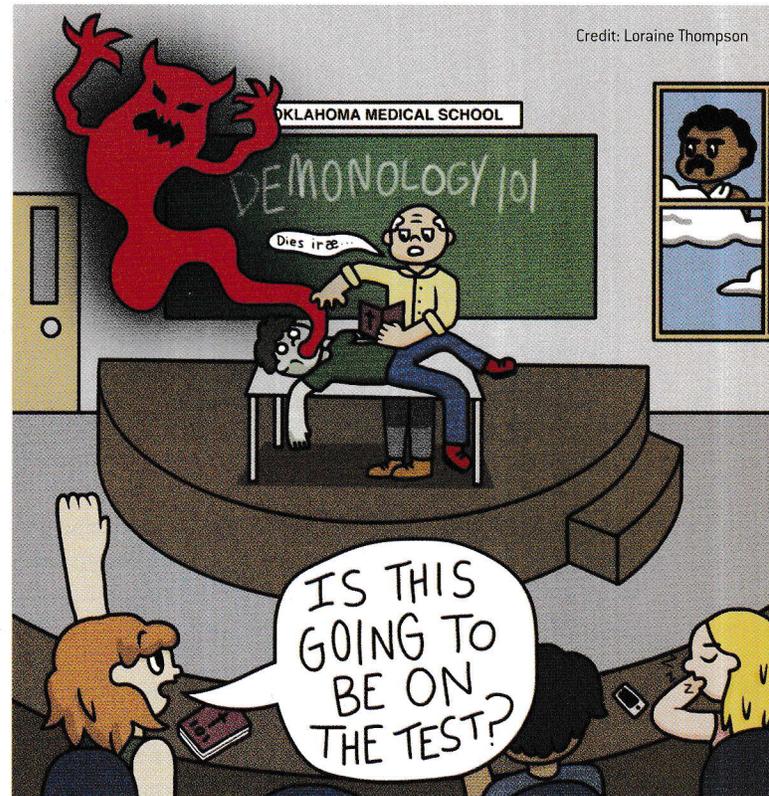
But if Inhofe is right and climate change is not occurring, then why do all the scientific measurements indicate that it is? Thermometer readings from all over the globe indicate that it is happening. This can only mean one thing: God is monkeying with all the thermometers.

Not only that, but my research shows that the buds of deciduous trees in Oklahoma have been opening earlier in the spring over the past fifteen years in response to warmer spring temperatures. The data of other researchers shows the same pattern in places such as Illinois and Wisconsin as well as in Europe. Perhaps God has been dashing around North America and Europe making the buds open sooner to trick us into believing in climate change.

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Creationists, like most other people, are perfectly happy to enjoy the fruits of medical research. They get drugs or surgery when they need them, and you don't see them seeking out exorcists to cast out demons when they are sick.

And yet, in the Gospels, fully one-third of the healing miracles that Jesus performs are described as exorcisms. I counted



them myself, in two different ways. I listed the miracles in each of the four Gospels and figured out which ones were parallel accounts of the same event. But whether I did this or counted each miracle separately, I came up with the one-third figure.

Then why are there no medical exorcisms today? You would expect at least one-third of all serious illnesses to be due to demons and incurable in any way other than exorcism. Why don't creationists seek out exorcists when they are ill? Why don't they write their legislators and demand that medical schools teach exorcism the way they demand that schools teach creationism? Where is creationist medicine?

There are several possibilities. First, maybe demons have decided to go into hiding. The Bible, of course, does not say this. Second, maybe the term *demon* really refers to germs and mutations. But this is a nonliteral interpretation, especially because the Bible says many demons actually spoke. Third, many



THE GREAT BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

The whole world involved in the last great clash of nations.
 "The nations were angry, and Thy wrath is come." Rev. 11:18.

diseases may be caused by demons, but God goes around and makes them look like they are caused by viruses, bacteria, defective genes, or metabolic disorders—once again, not in the Bible.

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One of the major breakthroughs in modern medicine was the discovery that many mental disorders are caused by problems with the brain. Some of these problems are due to injury, while others are due to genetic or developmental abnormalities. An understanding of brain-based behavioral problems has allowed the development of many interventions. Just one example is the surgical severing of the corpus callosum, between the two brain hemispheres, in extreme cases of epilepsy.

But these developments should make creationists quake in their sandals. The Bible repeatedly makes it clear that a person's behavior is due to their *soul*, not their brain. This is particularly true of epilepsy, the symptoms of which are described in Matthew 17 very clearly—and Jesus cured it by exorcism. The entire science of psychology stands as a threat to fundamentalist creationism. Genetic or developmental prob-

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lems with brain activity make people do things that the Bible clearly indicates will get you sent to hell. There is no excuse. Just as Jean Valjean (in *Les Misérables*) could not blame poverty for his decision to steal bread, you cannot use a genetic inclination toward impulsiveness (which some people have) as an excuse for sinful behavior. The whole basis of damnation is thus undermined—not by evolution but by neurobiology. Without damnation, how else can fundamentalists threaten us for not believing what they say?

Perhaps the most embarrassing example is that there appears to be a partial genetic basis for sexual orientation. But many conservatives insist that there is not, because if men are gay because of their genes, then this must be a bigger threat to the creationist version of Christianity than a whole ark full of Precambrian bunnies. Unless, that is, God slipped those genes into the cells of men who sinfully chose their behavior. I am not saying that genes force a person to behave a certain way; I am saying that the correlation between genes and behavior is significant and that behavior is not the result of a soul that is totally spiritual.

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Biblical prophecies about "the end times" are notoriously difficult to interpret, mainly because most of them were *not* intended by the original authors as prophecies about the end of the world. Creationist fundamentalists love to cite Revelation as being the guidebook to the horrific and imminent future of earth. But most biblical scholars have concluded that it is a veiled and coded criticism of the Roman Empire. Christians,

undergoing persecution, wanted to encourage one another to persist in their faith but did not want to come out and say that Rome was evil. Rome tolerated religious diversity but not criticism.

This difficulty has not stopped fundamentalists from constructing all manner of outlines of the future that they claim to be as inerrant as the Bible itself. My two favorite examples are a privately published book titled *88 Reasons Jesus Will Return in 1988* and an Adventist book published in 1917 that claimed the world would end in 1917 in a gigantic battle with America, Britain, and Czarist Russia on one side and the Chinese on the other. Before 1917 was out, Russia was no longer Czarist. And after the Great War (as it is still called in France), tanks and artillery would replace horses as the main engines of battle.

No two self-styled prophets can agree on their predictions. They used to say that the Whore of Babylon described in Revelation was the Catholic Church. Now some of them think it is Hillary Clinton. After Clinton dies, as we all must, who will it be then? Michelle Obama?

And some of these fundamentalists have their guns and enthusiasm ready. While I was standing in line at a Wal-Mart in Oklahoma, a woman was buying a huge cart of frozen food for her freezer, which will run on a generator when the end of the world begins. Her husband had his AK-47s ready at home. She volunteered all this information to me, a stranger.

Every detail of this nightmare future would have to be miraculous. Take, for example, the passage in Revelation 14 that says that, in the final judgment, human blood would run as deep as the bridles of the horses (about two meters) for 1,600 stadia, which is 290 kilometers. No indication is given of the width of this river of blood, but if we assume it is ten meters wide, we are talking about 2.9 million cubic meters of blood. It would take 580 million freshly squeezed adult humans to render this much blood, all in a valley just outside of Jerusalem. One would be excused for thinking that even a fundamentalist would not take these numbers seriously. Certainly, the original author could not have meant it literally. But I heard a preacher make this very claim on a Christian radio station. She was gathering people to pay for a trip to go see this valley and imagine what it would look like filled five feet deep in blood.

God miraculously creating tons of blood! We ain't seen nothing yet!

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Thus, at the end of this series, I appear to have left young-earth, global flood creationism down for the count on the mat. While this is true, it is not a very interesting outcome. Instead, the conclusion I wish to reach is that these creationists are taking the Bible—one of the most important products of human creativity—and forcing it into interpretations that the original authors could not have imagined. If a reader simply lets the Bible speak for itself, what does he or she find? The reader finds that the Bible is not a book but sixty-six books (or more, for Catholics) all written at different times and from different viewpoints. All the writers were struggling to make

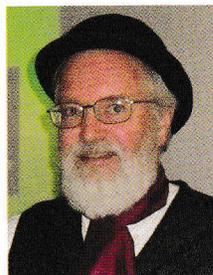
Creationist Funhouse Episodes in SKEPTICAL INQUIRER

1. "The Red Shift," May/June 2019
2. "The Curse," July/August 2019
3. "God Plays with Atoms," January/February 2020
4. "God Plays in the Mud," July/August 2020
5. "God's Pet Bunny," November/December 2020
6. "God the Biotechnologist," May/June 2021
7. "Lynn Margulis and the Great Convergence That Didn't Happen," July/August 2021
8. "No Rest for God," January/February 2022

sense of the human condition, and they did so through facts, history, stories, poetry, and prophetic visions. "The Bible" doesn't say much of anything, and its books say contradictory things. There is nothing wrong with this. We need to let the Bible be the Bible and not force it, or force God—whatever god there may be—into certain molds upon which we insist.

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of anything, and its books say
contradictory things.**

At least as important, humans should be free to investigate the mysteries of the world using whatever information is available—through science, philosophy, or art—rather than binding these mysteries into a little prison cell or blinding gullible religious people into not gaining knowledge. Give the pseudogenes a voice and let the red shift shine. ■



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