

have been a hot, molten mass.) This was of course an oversimplification of the problem, but his work did have wide influence, and encouraged others to make further investigations based on the lengths of time required for various physical processes. Thus Buffon set the stage for some of the more realistic estimates of the age of the earth which would be made during the next century; but in so doing he retained a profound respect for the Biblical record of creation.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of Buffon's recognition of the authority of the Bible, most theologians rejected his work. Very few churchmen were yet willing to admit that one might invoke the laws governing the rates of familiar natural processes as a means of estimating the antiquity of the earth. In England, during the late 18th century, opposition to geological science arose to an extreme peak under the influence of John Wesley, Adam Clark, Richard Watson, and other clergymen.<sup>9</sup> These men seemed unable to tolerate the idea that God has allowed man a degree of freedom to investigate the past history of His work of creation. They largely followed the then-current opinion that all knowledge of the earth's past history should come from the Bible itself. The fact that the Biblical authors do not purport to give anything like a complete summary of scientific information, or to state the age of the earth, apparently did not affect the views of these ministers.

#### Thomas Chalmers

In contrast, there were a few leading clergymen at the beginning of the 19th century who took the discoveries of geology seriously, and attempted to point out the agreement between geologic data and the Biblical account of creation. One of these was Thomas Chalmers, a highly conservative preacher and leader in the Scottish Church. Between 1804 and 1814 he published various works setting forth the view that between the original creation of the heavens and earth, and the first day of creation spoken of in Genesis 1:3-5, there was a long period of time. He took the first one and one-half verses of the chapter as referring to the original creation of the earth, and a subsequent time when the earth became desolate and uninhabitable.<sup>10</sup> This view is often referred to as the "gap theory of creation," or the "restitution hypothesis." It takes the Scripture account as leaving a time period before the six days of creation began, and postulates that most of the sedimentary deposits of the earth, with their fossils, were laid down during that period. Chalmers felt satisfied that most of the geologic record could be fitted into that expanse of time, and thus used this view to quell the fears of those who felt that the science of geology was posing a threat to the teaching of the Bible.

Actually, Chalmers was not the originator of the gap view of Genesis one. The Flemish scholar and monk Saint Victor Hugo, in the 12th century, definitely held that there was a very long time period between the original creation of the earth and the six-day creation described in Genesis one. He also stated that the existence of such a period of time had "already been debated" by earlier scholars.<sup>11</sup> Some other theologians who accepted the idea of this time gap were