Red Dynamite
Weinberg, Carl R.

Published by Cornell University Press

Weinberg, Carl R.
Red Dynamite: Creationism, Culture Wars, and Anticommunism in America.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/94363

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=3006913
“You don’t think much of scientists, do you?” So Clarence Darrow asked William Jennings Bryan, as he cross-examined the Great Commoner on the porch of the Rhea County Courthouse, in Dayton, Tennessee, on July 20, 1925, the seventh day of the Scopes trial. Knowing that Darrow was attempting to paint him as an unlettered ignoramus, Bryan insisted on naming specific examples of scientists he respected. “I will give you George M. Price,” he replied. But Darrow was not impressed. Bryan had cited “a man that every scientist in this country knows is a mountebank and a pretender, and not a geologist at all.”¹ It is true that George McCready Price (1870–1963) had no fans among American scientists. A Canadian-born Seventh-day Adventist writer, teacher, and self-trained geologist, Price was best known to them for his pioneering books in the field of what has come to be called “creation science.” For nearly two decades, starting in 1906, Price had published antievolutionary books and articles and taught science at a string of Seventh-day Adventist colleges. In 1923, Price published The New Geology, a college-level textbook that
denounced evolution as a scientific fraud. The book argued that a universal Noachian flood, and not eons of evolution, explained the geological features of the earth, which he estimated to be six thousand years old. Scientists knew Price, but they knew him, in the words of *Science* magazine, as the “principal scientific authority of the fundamentalists,” and not as a credentialed geologist.²

But there is a deeper sense in which Darrow’s characterization of Price as “not a geologist at all” can tell us more about Price than his academic marginalization. While Price published thousands of pages analyzing the conclusions of geologists, subscribed to scientific journals, and regularly corresponded with eminent researchers,³ his main objection to evolution—as he admitted—had nothing to do with the veracity of scientific claims. Rather, it was the “philosophical and moral” consequences of evolution—the “evil fruits” of the “corrupt tree,” in the words of Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount—that turned Price into a creationist. In a series of works published both before and after the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, Price made it clear that socialism and communism were among those evil fruits.⁴ A strange duality thus pervades the work of Price—who coined the phrase “Red Dynamite”—and that of his creationist successors. They seem to focus on the scientific evidence, or the lack thereof, for evolution. But what really troubles them are the alleged sociopolitical consequences of evolutionary belief. As Price’s geological work formed the intellectual basis, decades later, of John Whitcomb Jr. and Henry Morris’s highly influential young-earth creationist *Genesis Flood* (1961), Price is rightly viewed as the godfather of the modern creation science movement. But he was a creationist pioneer on both the geological and political frontiers.

It is impossible to understand George McCready Price and his creationist ideas without some appreciation of his Adventist theological perspective. Seventh-day Adventism originated as an offshoot of the millenarian movement led by farmer and lay preacher William Miller. He had fixed the date for Christ’s Second Coming as October 22, 1844, based on prophetic passages in the book of Daniel that foretold a “cleansing of the sanctuary.”⁵ In the wake of the “Great Disappointment” that followed the Messiah’s failure to appear, a group coalesced around the idea that Miller had not erred about the date, only about the nature of what had taken place.
Figure 4. George McCready Price, c. 1930. A devout Seventh-day Adventist and amateur geologist, Price was a pioneer in promoting young-earth creationism and linking the perceived dangers of evolution and communism. Courtesy of Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
Christ was indeed cleansing the sanctuary, but the event was taking place in the heavenly realm instead of on earth. By 1863, one “remnant” of the Millerite movement formally constituted itself as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, established its own weekly newspaper, and set up headquarters in Battle Creek, Michigan. Ellen G. White, née Harmon (1827–1915), who grew up in a Millerite family in Portland, Maine, began to have waking visions as a teenager. She married church cofounder James White and became the central seer and prophet of Seventh-day Adventism. Her writings are second only to the Bible as authority.6

Adventist theology developed into a variant of premillennialism. Christ was coming to establish his reign of a thousand years of heaven on earth (the millennium), but humanity would first pass through a terrible period—the tribulation—in which the Antichrist would gather strength and cause horrible suffering. Although those who accepted Christ would ultimately triumph, humanity was headed for disaster. For historicist premillennialists—which included Adventists, as well as most Protestants before the mid-nineteenth century—the biblical prophecies foretold history from ancient times through their own time. In regard to Revelation 13, the Adventists agreed with Protestant tradition that the first “beast,” with seven heads and ten horns, represented the Catholic Church.7

But the Adventists added a unique feature—their interpretation of the second beast of Revelation 13, which had “two horns like a lamb” and “spake as a dragon.” This hypocritical creature, who appeared Christlike but was later revealed to be Satan, was none other than the United States of America. The horns were, respectively, the republic and Protestantism, standing for civil and religious liberty. Despite their premillennialism and inclination toward political quietism, many founding Adventists were abolitionists and felt that the US was betraying its founding republican ideals. The early Adventists also felt betrayed by Protestantism because of the scorn they had suffered as they focused on the expected Advent. Their minority Sabbatarian beliefs made them sensitive to the movement for Sunday laws. While it was fellow Protestants leading these campaigns, the historic identification of the Antichrist with the pope, and the association of the Catholic Church with political tyranny, led Adventists to believe that the threat of a papal “despotism” was always imminent.8
The Adventist focus on the Saturday Sabbath day not only set the church apart in terms of liturgical practice, but also provided the framework for its distinctive position on evolution. By the late nineteenth century, many Protestant evangelical leaders had accepted the latest scientific discoveries that pointed to an ancient earth. They hewed either to the day/age theory, in which each biblical day of creation represented an indefinite period, or the gap theory, which postulated an unaccountably long delay between Genesis 1, the creation of the earth, and Genesis 2, the creation of Adam and Eve. But few Adventists took either of these positions, since in *Spiritual Gifts* (1864), Ellen White rejected both. Stating that she had been transported during a vision back to the time of creation, White reported that the week of Genesis was “just like every other week.” Genesis days meant “literal days.” To deny this fact was to launch a direct attack on the Fourth Commandment—“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.” White’s claim that the earth “is now only about six thousand years old” became part of bedrock Adventist doctrine.

Adventist responses to evolution also were informed by White’s explanation for biological diversity in the aftermath of the Noachian flood, which hinged on the concept of “amalgamation.” According to White, “every species of animal which God had created were preserved in the ark. The confused species which God did not create, which were the result of amalgamation, were destroyed by the flood. Since the flood there has been amalgamation of man and beast, as may be seen in the almost endless varieties of species of animals, and in certain races of men.” Adventists have argued over the proper interpretation of this passage, which seems to imply that humans and animals mated and produced offspring, and that some racial groups were less than fully human. Such implications not only violated existing scientific knowledge, but also cast doubt on the egalitarian values that the Adventist founders had embraced. Some Adventists contended that White meant, in effect, “of man and of beast,” but the evidence supports a plain reading of her words. Adventists understood her to mean that “certain races” included Africans, Native Americans, and others who were commonly classed as inferior. As for the cause of amalgamation and the proliferation of new “confused” non-godly species after the flood, White never explicitly identified it, but Adventist commentators
commonly assumed that it was Satan. Ellen White thus laid a rich foundation for Price’s antievolutionary thinking.

George Edward Price was born in 1870 on a farm in Havelock, New Brunswick, Canada. His father, George Marshall Price, farmed seven hundred acres. Susan McCready, Price’s mother, came from a more educated family. Her brother J. E. B. McCready was editor of the *Daily Telegraph* in Saint John. Because of the strength of young George Price’s literary ambitions—“I cannot remember a time in my early youth and young manhood when I did not aspire to be a writer”—he adopted his mother’s maiden name as his own. Soon after his father’s death, Susan McCready joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church and George took up a new occupation—selling Adventist books.

His stock-in-trade included Ellen G. White’s *The Great Controversy*, which focused on the contest between Lucifer and Jesus Christ. Part history, part prophecy, White’s book traced this struggle by following the fortunes of “God’s children.” They included early Christian martyrs, European Protestant reformers, William Miller, and the early leaders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. On the side of Satan stood the false Catholic Church, which presided over a long period of “spiritual darkness.” Moreover, readers were reminded about the various “snares” that Satan had planted among well-meaning but easily fooled Christians: “He is intruding his presence in every department of the household, in every street of our cities, in the churches, in the national councils, in the courts of justice, perplexing, deceiving, seducing, everywhere ruining the souls and bodies of men, women and children, breaking up families, sowing hatred, emulation, strife, sedition, murder.” To this familiar litany of Satan’s activities, White added the distinctive Adventist apocalyptic vision of how the “great controversy” would be resolved in favor of Christ. While Price would soon have his own experiences of battling demonic forces in the big city, this book, more than any other, convinced him that he should spend his life spreading God’s word.

For the next several years, George shared the experience of spreading this stormy but ultimately hopeful vision with his bookselling partner Amelia Anna Nason, a fellow native of New Brunswick. They developed a mutual affection, and in 1887 they were married.
Amelia attended Battle Creek College, an Adventist institution in Battle Creek, Michigan. Neither finished college, but both would enter the teaching profession. The couple had three children and would remain married for sixty-seven years. But for the first decade of the new century, they spent much of their time apart. George struggled to make ends meet in a succession of jobs as a bookseller, school administrator, teacher, preacher, writer, and handyman. One of these jobs landed him in Tracadie, New Brunswick, where he wrote his first book: *Outlines of Modern Christianity and Modern Science* (1902).

This book set the mold for Price in two fundamental ways. First, he focused his fire on evolutionary geologists’ alleged circular reasoning when determining the age of rock layers. Geologists assign dates to strata in the geologic column based on the types of creatures and plants fossilized therein. The simpler types of fossils are found in the lower layers. The contents of these layers are roughly consistent around the world. Evolutionists conclude that the lower strata must be older. But, Price wrote, “it is nothing but a pure assumption, utterly incapable of any rational proof.” Price argued instead that the specific gravity of different living creatures during the flood determined their place in the geologic column. (Later, in *Illogical Geology* [1906], after he had discovered that in some mountainous regions, the layers were out of expected order, with a “newer” stratum on top of an “older” one, Price attacked the idea that there was even a truly uniform geologic column. He scoffed at the commonly accepted geologic concept of thrust faults, tremendous pressures that, geologists believed, could accomplish this feat.)

Second, the book made clear his concern with the “political” consequences of evolutionary science. Price demonstrated how Adventist eschatology was intertwined with his developing moral and political critique of evolution. He prefaced the argument by invoking Christ’s teaching on false prophets in Matthew 7:15, using language creationists would repeatedly invoke: “It is rightly considered that the supreme test of any doctrine, religious, social, or scientific, is its bearing upon life and human action. ‘Ye shall know them by their fruits.’ What are the fruits of the evolution theory?” According to Price, evolution was “utterly subversive of civil and religious liberty for the individual.”

Evolution led to tyranny by accelerating social disorder. According the Price, acceptance of evolutionary ideas—the survival of the fittest—had caused “the increase of crime and lawlessness of every kind, the increased
lack of self-government on the part of the individual.” In associating evolution with lawlessness, Price may well have been influenced by discussions in the Adventist Review and Herald. Less than a month after the assassination of President McKinley the previous year, the editors opined that “every seed of evolution planted is also a seed of anarchy.”

To bolster his case in Outlines that evolution had caused lawlessness and thus drove society toward despotism, Price pointed to two “signs.” One was imperialism. “By our taking up the ‘white man’s burden’ of governing what we are pleased to call half-civilized peoples beyond the seas,” Price wrote, “we shall end up finding a similar state of things requiring attention at home.” Price echoed the concerns of other Seventh-day Adventists. Their peculiar concern with liberty had led the church to denounce the annexation of the Philippines. Percy Magan, who had taught Price Roman history at Battle Creek College, published a church-endorsed book on the subject in 1899 with a telling title: Imperialism versus the Bible, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence; or, The Peril of the Republic of the United States.

Price’s implicit criticism of imperialist racism also drew on Adventist traditions reaching back decades. Because of the abolitionist sympathies of William Miller and prominent Millerite abolitionists such as Joshua Himes, antislavery feeling and even belief in racial equality found a relatively accommodating home in the early Adventist movement. While Adventists were conflicted about performing military service, Ellen White and other Adventists publicly supported the Union side in the Civil War, viewing the slaveholders’ rebellion as satanically inspired. During Reconstruction, Adventist publications gave voice to Radical Republican views in favor of racial equality, though violence directed at interracial Adventist missions in the South led the church to modify its stance.

At the same time, Price was hardly a champion of full racial equality. He attributed human racial variety to three factors: God’s dispersal of humanity in punishment for the Tower of Babel; the changing environment; and the process of racial amalgamation, taught to him by Ellen White. In a poem penned in 1910, Price focused on the first two in explaining the origins of the allegedly inferior Negro race. According to Price, “the poor little fellow” who fled Babel to Africa “got lost in the forest dank,” acquired dark skin from the “fierce sun,” and “his mind became a blank.” In a later work, Price argued that the distinct human races “greatly resemble true species” and that “natural instincts,” aided by God’s providential
action at Babel, should have kept them separate. Contrary to nature and God’s will, however, a mixing of the races or “amalgamation” had taken place.32 Price acknowledged that he joined with other Adventists in identifying “the great primal hybridizer” of human races, plants, and animals as Satan.33 This claim anticipated mainstream evangelical arguments made decades later against the presumably satanic desegregation of the races in America.

Imperialism was one sign of the growing danger of despotism; another, closer to home, was the amassing of collective power by large corporations and by workers. “What with the labor unions, and what with the trusts,” wrote Price, “we are certainly beholding the fast passing of individualism.” In capital letters, Price warned of “THIS HEAVEN-DARKENING DESPOTISM OVER THE GRAVE OF LIBERTY.”34 Premillennialists expressed an evenhandedness on the subject of class conflict, viewing its very existence as a sign of the end times. But Adventists were not neutral on the subject of labor unions. In the wake of the 1902 anthracite coal strike, Ellen White had made the position of the church clear. “Unionism,” she wrote, “is controlled by the cruel power of Satan. Those who refuse to join the unions formed are made to feel this power.” The next year, the Review and Herald called labor unions “a dragon voice which is heard speaking in the nation to-day,” a clear reference to the second beast of Revelation 13.35 Not only were unions a threat to individual liberty; they were inextricably tied to the city and the “snares” set there by Satan.36 The satanic snares of the big city, including modern labor unions and their rebellious politics, played a key role in creationist and anticommunist thinking for decades to come.

Despite Ellen White’s warning, Price spent a short but eventful six months in the nation’s biggest city. In September 1904, Price arrived in New York, hoping to make a living as a writer. He moved into a room in a four-story brick apartment building at 95 Christopher Street, in the heart of the West Village.37 While the neighborhood’s bohemian days still lay ahead, it already had a reputation as a literary enclave. Herman Melville, Henry James, Mark Twain, Edgar Allan Poe, and other leading lights had lived and worked just blocks from Price’s temporary quarters.38 The trip was an economic and spiritual gamble. Not only was Price betting that he could obtain work writing for cosmopolitan, secular publications—something he had never done—but he was also directly disobeying
prophetess Ellen White’s injunction to avoid the big city in order to follow his quixotic dream of literary success. On both counts, the New York sojourn was a profound failure. As he informed SDA church elder William Guthrie in late December 1904, “experience has made me a wiser and sadder man.” After nearly four months in the city, Price had worked only about one-third of the time. Knowing that his own family back in New Brunswick was “destitute and almost starving” drove Price to thoughts of suicide and damnation. “Heaven only knows what privations I have gone through and what torment of soul I have suffered,” he told Guthrie. In early 1905, he moved out of the Village and into an apartment building on the edges of Hell’s Kitchen. He got steadier work, laboring sometimes up to fourteen hours a day, but worried about his “present associations and occupation, which are not right.” Feeling the lure of those satanic snares, Price wrote that my “eternal welfare is at stake in making a change and cutting away” from New York.

One of the temptations that New York City offered George McCready Price was the young but growing socialist movement. As a regular reader of the Adventist Review and Herald, Price would have encountered fairly regular discussions of the new party. Consistent with the approach that Price later took in his own writings, Adventist editors expressed sympathy with socialist aims, but they rejected collective political action. In a 1905 article commenting on the gains of the Socialists in the 1904 elections, church leader Leon A. Smith commented that “from a political standpoint, much may be said in favor of socialism as compared with other political systems”; and yet, the only solution to humanity’s problems was “the coming kingdom of Christ.”

Early 1905 was a heady time for New York City’s socialists. On January 22, which became known as “Bloody Sunday,” the troops of Czar Nicholas II fired rifles into a crowd of workers and peasants who had traveled to the Winter Palace to present a petition to their ruler. “Civil War Threatened, Workman Have Lost Faith in the Czar, and Now Mean to Fight,” read one headline in the New York Times the next day. As strikes quickly spread through St. Petersburg and beyond, Russian-Jewish socialists on the Lower East Side of New York, just across town from Price’s former digs, were electrified. “In that part of the city,” the paper reported, “thousands of men and women who have cared and suffered for the cause of Russian freedom, have found a haven, and there was not one of these who did not feel a personal share in the events.” Socialist intellectuals
from more privileged backgrounds were also inspired by the scale and
cialist William English Walling headed off to Russia to cover events for
the socialist press.  

In the spring of 1905, well before the Russian Revolution reached its
climax that fall, George McCready Price left New York City. He worked
a succession of jobs for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, landing even­
tually in Loma Linda, California, a budding Adventist settlement sixty
miles east of Los Angeles. Starting in 1907, he began teaching at the
Loma Linda College of Evangelists, and he would spend most of the re­
mainder of his life living and teaching at Adventist institutions. As one
of Price’s students recalled, “He opened every class with prayer. He al­
ways had a twinkle in his eyes.” As for his teaching methods, “I can’t
remember his just telling us things,” she noted. “We found them out by
experimentation.”

For Price, there was no contradiction between opening class with prayer
and then jumping into scientific investigation. Loma Linda students were
required to take a course in “Spirit of Prophecy” (on the life and writings
of Ellen White). The idea that nature and revelation were mutually rein­
forcing sources of truth drew on a centuries-old Christian apologetic tra­
dition reaching back to the writings of the early church fathers. In North
America, it appeared as early as 1721 with Cotton Mather’s Christian
Philosopher, which referred to the “Book of Nature” along with the Bible
as proof of God’s glory. These two sources of truth—and the dangers of
straying from them—were the primary focus of the book Price published
in 1911: God’s Two Books: Or Plain Facts about Evolution, Geology and
the Bible. Published by the Adventist Review and Herald Publishing As­
sociation, this work was the first one in which Price explicitly addressed
socialism and the labor movement. The intellectual framework for his
critique of evolution was the by-now familiar “fruits” argument, but this
time draped in a more rigorous scientific guise. Perhaps owing to his new­
found academic authority in a college classroom, Price paid more serious
attention in this work to the question of scientific method.

He did so by joining Protestant theology with Baconian empiricism. A
wide range of American Protestant thinkers had embraced Sir Francis
Bacon’s inductive method. Originally a weapon wielded against medi­
eval scholasticism, Baconian ideas were now enlisted as a defense of the
existing order against what were viewed as dangerously speculative hypotheses arising from the French Revolution. Pure facts, unadulterated by any (false) assumptions, came first; only then could conclusions follow. Without acknowledging the deductive character of their own theistic worldviews, Protestant leaders fixed on the words of scripture as the essential objective facts to be collected, classified, and organized. As American evangelical leader Reuben Torrey put it in his contribution to the *Fundamentals* on the subject of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, “We shall not assume anything whatever.”

The focus on collecting facts had a democratic flavor: any literate person with access to the Bible and a dose of what Price called “enlightened common sense” could use these facts to reach conclusions about both spiritual and earthly matters. A popularized version of Baconianism had become so firmly entrenched in England by the mid-nineteenth century that even Charles Darwin, who was putting forth the audacious hypothesis of natural selection, clothed his effort in proper Baconian garb on the frontispiece of the first edition of *On the Origin of Species*. The selection he chose from Bacon’s 1603 work, *The Advancement of Learning*, trumpeted the value of studying both “the book of God’s word” and “the book of God’s works.” For exactly opposite purposes, Price included on his title page of *God’s Two Books* a similar quotation from Bacon’s *De Augmentis Scientiarum*.52

In Price’s exploration of the facts of geology that fills most of the book’s pages, the speculative, nonfactual theory of evolution comes up wanting. Acknowledging that a certain amount of common descent must have taken place, Price derides evolutionists for their unwarranted “assumptions,” which get them into trouble. But Price’s own assumptions are revealed in his opening chapter, titled “Moral and Social Aspects of the Evolution Theory.” His argument that we can know the scientific theory of evolution by its “fruits” is by now familiar: “And surely the moral issue, as set forth above, is a surer way of gauging the truth or falsity of the Evolution theory than the long, complicated methods connected with ‘variation’ and ‘selection,’ ‘heredity’ and ‘environment,’ and the other biological problems, even supposing the theory apparently capable of the most exact proof. In short, we need offer no apology for thus measuring this scientific hypothesis by other and far more certain standards of proof.” Price makes here a remarkably un-Baconian and
anti-intellectual argument. The validity of a biological scientific idea has little to do with the status of the facts drawn from the natural world that support or refute that idea. To rescue his Baconianism, he suggests that the facts that truly matter are “moral” ones—the societal consequences of adopting evolutionary logic.

In *God’s Two Books*, Price for the first time made an explicit connection between the “moral” fruits of evolution and socialism. The basic framework—that evolutionary theory threatens liberty—harked back to his discussion in *Outlines* nine years earlier. But Price now seems more alarmed at the potential consequences of the “ceaseless struggle for existence and survival at the expense of others.” He points to the danger of “the grim, Red terror loading its pistol and sharpening its dirk while awaiting the opportune time to strike.” Price argues that evolutionary “ethics” are the primary cause of “firing the blood and quickening the pace of the present strenuous age, until the only apparent outcome will be the wreck and anarchy of Revolution.”55 Evolution was not only unscientific but politically dangerous.

Price’s growing concern with the Socialists had everything to do with the real political gains they had made since 1902, covered amply in the Adventist press. Since Price was based near Los Angeles, it is likely that his thinking about the fruits of evolutionary science was affected by a literal explosion that took place there shortly before *God’s Two Books* was completed. On October 1, 1910, a dynamite bomb ripped through the *Los Angeles Times* building, setting it on fire, killing twenty-one people, and injuring one hundred. The blast took place during a strike by unionized ironworkers against the city’s iron manufacturers. *Times* publisher Harrison Gray Otis was bitterly antiunion and ran the city’s employer association, which aimed to break the strike. Otis promptly accused unionists—whom he called “anarchist scum”—of setting the bombs. In April 1911, authorities arrested and charged ironworker union leaders J. B. and J. J. McNamara for the crime, to which they pleaded not guilty. The American Federation of Labor rallied to their defense, as did the Socialist Party. Job Harriman, Socialist front-runner in the Los Angeles mayoral race, joined the McNamara’s defense team, which was headed by Clarence Darrow. But soon after the trial opened in October, the brothers changed their pleas and admitted to carrying out the bombing.56
George McCready Price and other readers of the Adventist press received a steady stream of commentary on the McNamara case. Upon the arrest of the two brothers, an article in the Adventist magazine *Signs of the Times* noted that the Socialists “propose to make ‘California a battleground.’” Observing that opinion was deeply divided over the McNamara’s guilt, the *Signs* editors placed the conflict in prophetic perspective. “Strifes of this kind are growing both in frequency and in bitterness,” they wrote. In the spring of 1911, *Signs* reported that William “Big Bill” Haywood had proposed a general strike to protest the “capitalistic conspiracy” against the McNamaras, a move the editors opposed. *Signs* also ran a lengthy article on the rise of socialism—“the world-wide spirit of revolution”—that focused on the McNamara case. It featured a substantial excerpt of a piece by Socialist Eugene Debs, who also called for a general strike and a massive Socialist election day turnout.

The optimism of Debs and fellow Socialists in early 1912 was bolstered by the growing Socialist vote. In November 1912, Debs received some nine hundred thousand votes in his presidential bid. The Adventist press followed these events and provided readers with ample coverage of Socialist proposals. A 1912 *Review and Herald* article quoted a recent *Outlook* article that noted with alarm the election of Socialist mayors in a number of industrial cities and towns, as well as the election in New York and Rhode Island of Socialist state legislators. That article also drew from a speech given by the president of Cornell University Jacob Gould Schurman, who stated that “the spirit of discontent is far more widely diffused than ever before, and the causes are at once more fundamental and more permanent.” His assessment, wrote the Adventist editors, “is worthy of serious consideration.”

As the *Review and Herald* educated Adventist readers about how socialists fit into the “signs of the times,” Price published *Back to the Bible* (1916), in which he once again addressed socialism and its evolutionary connections. Price warned of the danger inherent in humanity trying to organize on a global scale to improve the world. Whether such efforts were led by “the capitalistic classes” or “the proletariat,” they both fell prey to the “deification of man.” Rather than accept that the ultimate cause of misery is “man’s evil nature,” such schemes of world federation rested on the false idea that an “evil environment” was to blame. This idea, in turn, derived from the “Evolution doctrine,” which argued that
“all things relating to human life are equally and entirely mere matters of convention, matters of expediency; that morality is only petrified custom.” The concept of social evolution was dangerous.

While Price claimed that either capitalists or workers could push such a scheme, his discussion focused on the latter. “The radicals among the Socialists, the labor-unionists, the I.W.W.,—in a word, the whole of the proletariat,—are raising issues which they consider are the real first steps toward the goal of their ambitions,” warned Price. But following the lead of the Review and Herald, Price added a disclaimer, saying that he was merely studying the subject in the “impartial spirit of science.” He went even further, saying he wanted to clarify his position: “All honor to those who are trying to secure by every righteous means a greater degree of ‘social justice’ for the oppressed and downtrodden.”

The degree to which Price salutes the socialists is striking. It may be that his own struggle for survival on the margins of academic respectability and economic security made him more sympathetic to the socialist message. Price’s career trajectory fluctuated in the period after 1912. His position at the renamed College of Medical Evangelists in Loma Linda ended in that year. Over the following six years, he taught at two Adventist secondary institutions—Fernando Academy in Los Angeles County, from 1912 to 1914, and then Lodi Academy from 1914 until 1920, when he once again obtained a college-level position.

Not only does Price concede socialists their good intentions, but he provides an analysis that mirrors the Communist Manifesto. Price attributes the trend toward world federation to several “material factors,” including the railroad, steamship, automobile, telephone, and telegraph. They have converted the world into “one vast community with common interests, common aspirations, and a unified self-consciousness.” Moreover, writes Price, corporations that no longer are confined within national borders are also contributing to this growing sense of “internationalism.” Whether one seeks to build a global capitalist empire or an international labor movement, “consolidated humanity” is essential. Price even shares some of Marx and Engels’s revolutionary optimism. Witness Price’s identification of the radical section of the labor movement with “the whole of the proletariat.”

Whether or not Price sympathized with secular rebels, he was certain that the socialist quest for international proletarian brotherhood would
end in disaster. In Back to the Bible, Price concluded that in comparison with the looming threats to American liberty, “the Roman Empire . . . was a mere baby.” And yet, for premillennialists, there is always a silver lining in bad news. Price predicted that this latest drive for “federation of the world” by the socialists could lead God to end the “long reign of sin.” In a perverse way, the socialists might speed the Second Coming of Christ.

When Price returned to the topic of socialism five years later, there was no mistaking his negative tone. In the aftermath of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution, his attitude had hardened. Socialism now represented more than meetings, agitators, and subversive books—it meant a revolutionary government in power. It also appeared ever more closely intertwined with evolution. Socialism in the Test-Tube (1921) warned of the dangers of the Bolshevik government and its evolutionary philosophy. Richly illustrated and coauthored with Seventh-day Adventist missionary Robert B. Thurber, the book was aimed at a popular audience. Its argument takes the form of a fictional conversation between Gordon, a young American soldier on leave from the fighting in France, and some of his friends and neighbors.

The most influential of those friends was Colonel Newcome, a well-traveled former army surgeon with an encyclopedic knowledge of the history of socialism from Marx to Lenin. On the good colonel’s veranda, Gordon learns how Marx’s materialist interpretation of history embraces an evolutionary conception of morality. “All man’s notions of right and wrong, all of his habits of thought, his ideals, and also his religion,” explains the colonel, “are in the final analysis wholly the product of his economic life.” The colonel quotes Engels from The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State on the passing away of the “monogamous family.” The book, says the colonel, “gives an economic twist to the ordinary Darwinian theory.” Without mentioning the “Bureau of Free Love,” Newcome attributes to Karl Kautsky the notion that women, under socialism, are common property of men. “Say, Colonel, that’s abominable!” responds Gordon.

Thurber and Price reinforce this image of evolutionary abomination with a “free-love caricature”; a hand-drawn illustration of a “Soviet Russian marriage” that can be broken off as soon as one member of the
couple loses sexual interest. The betrothed couple stand in a city office surrounded by communist bureaucrats. Husband and wife grasp the red flag and gaze at portraits of Lenin, Trotsky, and Marx. Summing up the connection between the Soviet republic and evolutionary thought, another neighbor tells Gordon, “The ethics of the jungle and the cave, inspired by Darwinism, and the doctrine of the class war and dictatorship of the proletariat, taught by Socialism, may be trusted to evolve the vulgar tyranny of Bolshevism, but never the orderly democracy of America.”

Price’s *Poisoning Democracy* (1921) sounded similar themes. Published by Fleming H. Revell, whose imprint included a wide swath of American fundamentalist authors, the book made it clear how closely allied evolution and socialism were. The “Evolution doctrine,” wrote Price, “develops logically and inevitably into Socialism and Bolshevism as its natural expression in the department of social and civil life.” In comparison with the vague discussion in *Outlines*, Price clearly explained why socialism could also be viewed as a form of religious despotism. He drew an intriguing parallel between his own eschatology and Marxism: “The picturesque stories of Darwin’s struggle for existence and the ape origin of man constitute the Genesis and Exodus of the socialist Bible; the economic interpretation of history makes up the rest of its Old Testament; while the cheerful doctrine of the class struggle is its Apocalypse, with its prophecy of a coming Armageddon, followed by a socialist new heaven and new earth.” Socialism was a religious faith. It was the “devil’s poison for democracy,”—a poison for the working classes who accept it as their religion.”

Elaborating on the “devil’s poison,” Price pointed to Russia, where, he said, “these doctrines have been carried to their logical results.” Reflecting Price’s concern with the moral impact of communist evolutionism, his examples revolved around the family, gender, and sexuality. Price reported that under the new legal regime, in order to obtain a marriage or divorce, Russians needed only to walk to city hall and sign a register. Drawing from an account published in the *Literary Digest*, Price informed his readers that Russian children were subject to a “fiendish” and “Satanic” scheme of public school indoctrination directed by Anatoly Lunacharsky,
the Bolshevik commissar of public education. Children attended dancing sessions into the wee hours of the morning, without parents present. “Last winter,” an eyewitness reported, “it was painful to see miserable mothers waiting all night in the snow outside of brilliantly illuminated school buildings, where the boys and girls were dancing the tango and foxtrot.” The original Literary Digest article added the following salacious commentary, withheld by Price: “All the children’s time is taken up with flirtation and dancing-lessons. In the state boarding-schools boys and girls are quartered in the same dormitory.” 70 Perhaps with these words in mind, Price asked, “What normal individual, whose mind has not been perverted and depraved through worshipping the false gods of an unnatural and irrational philosophy, desires these experiences to be repeated in America?” 71

The Adventist concern with the immoral “fruit” of Russian communism dovetailed with a broader critique of “companionate marriage” in the US during the post–World War I period on the grounds that it was “Bolshevik” and “Anti-Christian.” 72 As one 1919 article quoted a witness testifying before a US Senate investigating committee, “They are aiming at free love and hope to do away with marriage; to make marriage a contract for a term of years, so to speak.” 73 Price provided “damning” quotations from socialists in Poisoning Democracy, such as one from August Bebel’s Woman and Socialism, in which the author wrote that “the contract between the two lovers is of a private nature, as in primitive times, without the intervention of any functionary.” 74 And what of the impact on children? Price also quoted John Spargo, a leading Socialist Party intellectual who blended Marx, Darwin, and Spencer for a popular audience. 75 Spargo eagerly anticipated that a socialist regime would prohibit religious education for children until they reached an age where they could exercise “independence of thought.” For Price, Spargo was foreshadowing a nightmarish time when children of the new socialist marriage would be “the property of the State.” 76

Poisoning Democracy garnered some high-profile reviews. An anonymous reviewer for the Literary Digest wrote that Price’s latest work was “truly a remarkable little book entitled to more consideration than it is likely to get.” Price received plaudits for an argument that was “inexorably logical” and “ingenious” and a writing style that showed “admirable lucidity.” At the same time, the reviewer did find Price’s eschatology
“curious,” coming as it did from a college geology professor. Price must have been pleased with the review, especially its comment on his literary prowess.

The reviewer’s reaction was not shared by Bryn Mawr College geologist Malcolm Bissell. He sent off a blistering attack on Price to the Digest. Far from being worthy of “more serious consideration,” Bissell wrote, Poisoning Democracy is “not worth noticing at all.” Citing Price’s dismissal of thrust faults, Bissell thought the book showed an “astonishing ignorance” of science. When Price wrote to the geologist in defense of his work, Bissell’s response was blunt: “There is something wrong with your mental processes.” Bissell also questioned the “evil fruits” argument that Price had made central to Poisoning Democracy, since it implied that all evolutionists were immoral. “This is absurd,” wrote Bissell.

Price’s Adventist flood geology continued to have limited appeal, but in the post–World War I years, his twin indictment of Bolshevism and evolutionism struck a chord with some secular conservatives. In early 1922, Poisoning Democracy received favorable coverage in the Constitutional Review, published by the National Association for Constitutional Government. Price, wrote a reviewer, provided a “scathing indictment” of “socialism’s shuddering aversion from religious beliefs and observances, its degrading attitude toward the relation of the sexes and family life, and its fluctuating and opportunist standards of right and wrong.”

Poisoning Democracy also drew praise from conservative evangelicals who shared Price’s apprehension about the moral and political fruits of evolutionary thought. A reviewer for Sunday School Times, a long-standing independent tabloid with a circulation of some eighty thousand, noted the “cogency” of Price’s contention that socialism was the “economic aspect” of evolution. He called for the book to be “widely circulated, especially among young men and women who have been attracted by the glamour of Socialism.” Price supporters included Virginia educator and conservative Presbyterian Joseph D. Eggleston. He had sent Price a string of friendly missives during the World War I years, while serving as president of Virginia Polytechnic Institute. In 1921, as newly appointed president of his alma mater, the Presbyterian-affiliated Hampton-Sydney College, Eggleston wrote to congratulate Price on Poisoning Democracy, which he termed a “smashing indictment.” Writing in the early days of Prohibition and facing unruly students at his beloved school, Eggleston shared
the news with Price that fellow Presbyterian crusader William Jennings Bryan had come through town speaking on the “menace” to young people of “Evolution and the Higher Criticism.” Price must have been thrilled to be placed in company with the “Great Commoner,” the most prominent opponent of evolutionary thought.

Bryan had been making his own fruitistic arguments about evolution. He famously attributed the carnage of World War I to the spread of evolutionary ideas among the German General Staff. He also held Darwin’s ideas responsible for the crime at the center of the first “trial of the century.” In 1924, Clarence Darrow defended the Chicago teenagers Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb, who had killed a young classmate in order to prove they could commit the perfect crime. Darrow saved them from the death penalty by arguing that Leopold and Loeb were victims of their social environment, both the evolution-tinged ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and, even more powerfully, the example and patriotic glorification of mass murder on European battlefields. Bryan likened Nietzsche’s rejection of moral codes to a bottle of “poison” infusing “the souls of our boys.” Society needed to accurately label the Nietzschean and Darwinian bottles before they did any more damage.

Bryan also joined Price in identifying communism as one of evolution’s evil fruits. In a 1921 sermon “The Bible and Its Enemies,” Bryan focused on the dire practical consequences of Darwinism. After making his customary link to the Great War, Bryan drew from a book published by popular English writer Harold Begbie. Like Bryan, Begbie had been an advocate of Christian-based social reform and a pacifist. After the war, his politics turned sharply right. In a passage Bryan quoted in his sermon, Begbie expanded the list of evolution’s evil fruits. “Darwinism,” he wrote, “not only justifies the Sensualist at the trough and Fashion at her glass; it justifies Prussianism at the cannon, and Bolshevism at the prison door.” Driving home the latter point, Bryan wrapped up his sermon as follows: Darwinism undermined Christian belief, promoted world war, and, in his own words, “is dividing society into classes that fight each other on a brute basis.”

In the wake of World War I, as Bryan, Baptist William Bell Riley, and other antievolution activists went into action, Price and Adventist church leaders increasingly found common ground with fundamentalists.
In a 1925 issue of the Review and Herald, an advertisement for all of Price’s books appeared under the heading “Fundamentalist Literature.” Signs of the Times even ran a seven-part series of articles on evolution and Christianity by Riley. That fall, after Riley had spoken in Portland, Oregon, Price received an encouraging letter from the president of Adventist-affiliated Union College. “The manager of our Pacific Press branch in Portland told me,” he reported to Price, that “he sold sixty-six books mostly on writings of yours in one evening on the occasion of a lecture by Dr. Riley on evolution.” Price was moving closer to Protestant fundamentalist respectability.

It is likely that one of the books sold at Riley’s talk was Price’s latest work to engage the topic of evolution and socialism, The Predicament of Evolution (1925). While Predicament introduced no new arguments, its relative brevity (128 pages) and its ninety illustrations may have made it a more powerful vehicle for Price’s message than either Poisoning or Test-Tube. Signs of the Times advertised the book as a “little volume” written in “popular style.” Compared to Poisoning, which sold for $1.40, Predicament cost only 50 cents. Another Adventist publication promoted Predicament with a full-page ad featuring an orangutan-looking creature seated on a chair, alongside the heading, “‘Gorilla Sermons’: Did your ancestors originate in the Garden of Eden or the Zoological Gardens?” The Scopes trial had broadened the appeal of Price’s subject, which, the ad noted, was “now being discussed in the newspapers.”

“Red Dynamite” was the title of Price’s chapter on socialism and its connection to evolution. Price played on a quotation from a 1914 interview the New York Sun had conducted with Call of the Carpenter author Bouck White, a month before the Church of the Social Revolution’s “invasion” of Calvary Baptist. White had been speaking about his alma mater, the Union Theological Seminary, and aimed to counter criticism from fellow Socialist Party members that modern biblical scholars were disconnected from the class struggle. To the contrary, argued White, liberal seminary teachers, by revealing Jesus as a social rebel, aided the cause of socialist revolution. As quoted by Price, White approvingly described their teachings—which included an openness to theistic evolution—as “social dynamite” that will “blow up the whole apparatus” of capitalist civilization. To bring home the point about literal and figurative dynamite,
Price included a photo of the aftermath of the September 16, 1920, bombing on Wall Street, just outside the banking house of J.P. Morgan. The blast killed thirty-eight and injured hundreds. Although a culprit was never identified, the event provided evidence for Price that “‘Red’ influence is wide in America.”

To develop his argument about the “Red” connection to evolution, Price asked readers to imagine the following scenario: You have a million dollars that you need to transport by car at night down a “long, lonely road.” You need to enlist the help of an armed guard who will sit in the backseat with the treasure. There are two candidates for the job. One is a Bible-believing Christian raised in a “Puritan” home. He lives to repay a debt to God, his Creator, for giving him life on earth, and to Christ, for giving him the promise of eternal life. He feels indebted to “all his fellow men” for they were, like him, created beings. The other man views the Bible as a “collection of myths,” believes that humans descend from “brute ancestors,” and feels no obligation to anyone. He wants to get the most he can out of life and, first and foremost, to take care of himself. Whom would you pick? As Price informs us, the treasure represents modern culture and civilization. Do we want to entrust it to those whose moral code is based on belief in a Creator, or to those who believe that our morality is “only what developing anthropoids” have agreed is best for our stage in the evolutionary process?

Taking on this materialist tenet of Marxist thought—that the morality of a given society is a product of its mode of production and ruling class—Price argued the idealist opposite. Civilization, he writes, is “not a cause, but a consequence” of ideas. Only religious faith can produce morality, and the two of them generate civilization. Since evolutionary ideas pull the rug out from under the foundations of faith and God-given morality, civilization—defined as the family, the “sacredness of human life,” and “the rights of private property”—is in trouble. Under the heading “Evolution and Socialism One,” illustrated by portraits of Marx and Lenin, Price spelled out the nature of the threat: “Marxian Socialism and the radical criticism of the Bible, though arising first in point of time, are now proceeding hand in hand with the doctrine of organic evolution to break down all those ideas of morality, all those concepts of the sacredness of marriage and of private property, upon which Occidental civilization has been built during the past thousand years.” Focusing his attention on the
danger of teaching evolution in the schools, Price urged his readers not to become complacent. The post–World War I wave of radicalism had ebbed. But since “Marxian socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat are merely the economic aspects of the doctrine of organic evolution,” and since evolution continues to be taught to schoolchildren, a resurgence of a movement for “Social Revolution” is “inevitable.”

George McCready Price was outside the evangelical mainstream. His Adventist theology and his insistence on a literal six-day creation set him apart. But under the impact of the Bolshevik Revolution, the birth of an American communist movement that openly championed evolutionary science, and the increasingly public battle over evolution in the schools, Price’s equation of socialism, Bolshevism, evolution, and immorality gained currency. In the years surrounding the Scopes trial of 1925, a range of figures from William Bell Riley to Gerald Winrod to J. Frank Norris to Mordecai Ham all gave voice to this antievolutionist theme in sermons and writings. The influence of Price’s flood geology on the content of “creation science” would not reappear in a significant way until the 1960s. But his view of evolution as “Red Dynamite” would prove to be tailor-made for the 1920s.