BIBLICAL LITERALISM TROUBLING -- AND WRONG

What do Americans fear most in the world? Religious zealotry based on fundamentalist thinking. Mike Huckabee's candidacy is just that, albeit with a very soft touch. To my mind, his adult life story reads like the old hymn "Onward, Christian Soldiers" stripped of its military overtones.

I normally steer clear of politics as a columnist. But Huckabee's ascendancy as a politician scares me, especially as he heads for primaries in the Bible Belt. Election of a highly skilled evangelical preacher to the U.S. presidency would be an unmitigated disaster in a country founded on religious tolerance and now at "war" with radical Islam.

Mike is extremely likable, genuine and verbally skilled. He has integrity. No flip-flops noted. He is committed to many causes I believe in. But, according to a recent Washington Post article, "Huckabee was taught as a child that Adam and Eve were real people, that God created the Earth in seven days, that evolution is a false doctrine and that homosexuality is a grave sin - all views he still holds today." This world-view emerges from the pages of an old, but still wildly popular book called the Bible.

There is no way that science can test most of the statements above that Huckabee believes. But the claim that Earth was created in seven days is specific enough to be framed as a hypothesis and tested.

It's wrong. Dead wrong on three counts. As goes this error, so goes the concept of inerrancy.

Seven days is wrong, even as metaphor. When the Earth first formed, the sun was much dimmer and the atmosphere was so dense with clouds of steam and toxic gases that Earth's broiling hot surface may have been perpetually dark, except for the proverbial fires of Hell. At times, the difference between day and night may have been undetectable. In other words, creation probably happened before days became days.

Seven days is wrong as duration. Days are longer now than when the Earth was being created. Astronomers know this because they've calculated the rate at which the Earth is slowing down due to tidal friction, with the moon receding in sympathy. Geologists know this from counting growth rings on ancient corals and clams. As late as half a billion years ago, each day would have been considerably briefer than those of Genesis.

Seven days is wrong as sequence. The Garden of Eden couldn't have existed until land plants emerged from the sea. This didn't happen until more than 90 percent of Earth's history had already passed. Creation wasn't a weeklong episode followed by human history. Creation is a continuous process that has been taking place for 13.7 billion years of deep time.

Disregarding facts to the contrary, belief in a seven-day creation and a very short Earth history has enormous, if not growing, appeal for Americans. For the past quarter-century, approximately 45 percent of Americans have consistently agreed with the Gallup Poll statement: "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so." These people vote. My guess is that they will vote for Mike.

I wouldn't be concerned if Huckabee's candidacy wasn't tapping into a religious cultural shift in America toward biblical conservatism. One signal of this change is the extraordinary attendance at the new Creation Museum near Cincinnati, which was built by a group called Answers in Genesis.
More than a quarter-million people, many from church groups, visited and paid the $20 admission fee within the first six months, as if pilgrims to this font of false knowledge.

Another indicator is the termination of Christine Comer, director of science curriculum of the Texas Education Agency, allegedly for being critical of "intelligent design" creationism.

But what really scares me is the successful completion of the First Conference on Creation Geology held last year at Cedarville University in Ohio, and reported in a recent article in the New York Times Magazine.

At the conference, academic turncoats with bright minds and prestigious credentials stood science on its head in order to pass earthly observations through a biblical filter. They are strengthening the appeal of "young-earth creationism," a popular, albeit impossible belief.