

CREATION, SCIENCE AND "CREATION SCIENCE"

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I hesitate to express in writing my personal views on the present subject, knowing that I am likely to be labeled as superstitious by some people and an agent of the Devil by others. However, though the matter is unimportant for my personal faith, it is very important for many other people. For one thing, it produces a reluctance of some students, particularly those from the Pacific Islands, to study science at university because they fear that that what they will be taught in biology and geology classes will conflict with their Christian faith as received from their parents. More generally, it serves as a stumbling block for many who would be otherwise attracted to Christianity but are repelled because Christianity is perceived as being in conflict with a rational scientific view of the world. Hence I am led to write this article. The following account is impressionistic, because right now I have neither time nor space to write a more coherent version.

At the outset, I distinguish "creation science" from creation and science. The term "creation science" should always be put in quotes because it is a misnomer. "Creation science" involves a distorted view of the Christian doctrine of creation, and a distorted view of science. It is a term coined within the last forty years in the USA by people who wanted to circumvent the First Amendment of the US Constitution in order to get their version of origins, a version based on a literal reading of the first eleven chapters of Genesis, taught in the public school system at the expense of the teaching of evolution. "Creation science" has since been exported to other countries, including New Zealand. The result has been that Christianity has been placed in a position of disrepute. As a Christian, I deeply regret that I have to admit that I find a great deal of truth in the book by Ian Plimer titled "Telling Lies for God" (Random House Australia, 1994).

The spur for my current concern has been my friend whom I will call Edward (to protect him from a possible backlash from "creation scientists"), who for a number of years has been deeply interested in the "creation science" literature, but is still ready to listen to other views. Edward recently invited me to attend with him a talk given by John McKay, Director of the Creation Research Institute in Australia (not to be confused with the Institute of Creation Research in California). Two things about the talk remain in my memory. One slide shown by McKay was a copy of a page of a book by Derek Ager, showing a photograph that apparently supported McKay's view. The speaker emphasized the authority of the author, asking us, "Who of you has had a book published by Oxford University Press?" Later when I read the book in the University library (it is actually published by Cambridge University Press, 1993, and is titled "The New Catastrophism"), I found in the preface an explicit disclaimer, in bold type, by the author that "in view of the misuse that my words have been put to in the past, I wish to say that nothing in this book should be taken out of context and thought in any way to support the views of the 'creationist' (who I refuse to call 'scientific')." In my view it is intellectually dishonest to claim support from an author when one is taking something out of context with an implication that is diametrically opposite from the author's intention. (Incidentally,

"creation scientists" place a great deal of emphasis on the academic credentials of authors. I happen to have university degrees in both Science and Theology, but readers should not be excessively impressed by that fact!) The second memorable thing was that at question time Edward asked McKay why his view of geological science was so important. In reply, McKay started with the verse from Jeremiah 33:20, which refers to day and night and the covenant with David. The connection with Genesis 1:3 was so tenuous that even Edward was not impressed by the answer he got.

After the talk, I had the opportunity to buy some books that McKay had brought with him. I by-passed the books by Whitcomb, Morris and Gish that I had already read (at least in earlier editions) and bought the book "God at Ground Zero: The Manhattan Project and a Scientist's Discovery of Christ, the Creator", by Curt Sewell (Master Books, 1997). The subtitle is misleading. Sewell was not a scientist and he did not design experiments at Los Alamos; rather he was an engineer who built specialized measuring instruments. Further, he was a lifetime Christian who only much later adopted a creationist position. The book is an honest account. Sewell provides little in the way of new argument, but he summarizes well the anti-evolution arguments of others. These are convincing enough for a fundamentalist Christian layman, but Sewell, like other "creation scientists", does not deal properly with the vast amount of evidence, from a variety of disciplines, that has accumulated over the last 150 years which shows that evolution has occurred. Further, he uses space to include arguments that long ago have been convincingly discredited. Examples of such arguments are the claim that human footprints occur alongside dinosaur tracks in Cretaceous limestone of the Paluxy riverbed in Texas, and the claim that the speed of light has varied substantially over the last 300 years and so radiometric dating is unreliable. To his credit, Sewell admits that these claims are controversial, but the fact that he mentions them at all is an indictment of his scientific judgement.

That led me to do some more reading. It is regrettable but understandable that the Auckland Public library does not hold books on "creation science". (Even if it held them, their classification would be controversial. Logically they should go in the Theology section, with books on Genesis.) Fortunately, I was able to borrow a number of interesting books from Edward. One of them was by Andy McIntosh, "Genesis for Today" (Day One Publications, 1997). Like myself, the author is an applied mathematician who works on problems involving fluid flow and heat transfer, and last year he gave an excellent seminar in the Mathematics Department of the University of Auckland. However, when it comes to biblical scholarship we part company dramatically. McIntosh takes Genesis 1-11 as both literal history and as allegory, prefiguring Christ. Thus McIntosh is ignoring all modern scholarship about the book of Genesis.

It is useless to argue with "creation scientists" about evolution, because these people are committed to a world view which rejects any possibility of any compromise. They believe that any departure from their particular interpretation of Genesis will cause the collapse of Christian faith and its implications for morality, and so they will go to any lengths to maintain their position. For example, if a scientist points out that Archaeopteryx is an intermediate form between reptile and bird, then they say that it is a bird (because it has feathers), despite the fact that it is so close to being a reptile that the

first fossil specimens found were originally labelled as reptiles. If a scientist points out that a multitude of different ways of measurement show that the age of the Earth is many million years rather than a few thousand years, the "creation scientists" say that all those measurement techniques must be flawed.

The interpretation by "creation scientists" of the book of Genesis is based on a doctrine of the infallibility and inerrancy of scripture, a doctrine that is alien to the church fathers and later theologians such as Calvin, and which is in fact a product of the Enlightenment. By inerrancy they mean inerrancy with regard to statements about events that are described as occurring in the past. They are unable to accept that the early chapters of Genesis are not talking about history, but are theological stories, written with the purpose of setting apart the monotheistic religion of Israel from the polytheistic religion of its neighbours. A single short passage should be enough to convince anyone with an open mind that not all of Genesis is history. The passage is Genesis 9:8-17. In this passage God says that he is setting his rainbow in the clouds as a sign of a covenant that he has established between himself and all flesh upon the earth. Unless one is prepared to accept a disruption in the laws of physics, it is nonsense to take this as implying that there was a time before which the raindrops in clouds did *not* refract sunlight. The passage is clearly concerned with theology, not history nor science.

Earlier I wrote that "creation science" led to faulty science and faulty theology. As an instance of faulty science, I instance the fact that a special issue (Vol. 10, part 1, 1996) of the *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* was devoted to discussion of the post-flood geological discontinuity. The "creation scientists" should (but will not) recognize from the fact that they disagree on the date of this discontinuity that there is no discontinuity, and in fact that there is no evidence for a world-wide flood. It would be disastrous if "creation scientists" ever prevented the teaching of evolutionary based science in universities or if they ever controlled research funds for science.

The faulty theology of fundamentalist "creation scientists" is also a serious matter. They give an undue emphasis to the mechanics of creation and to what happened at a single point in time. They thus largely overlook other scriptural references to creation, as in Psalms and Isaiah. Further, their interpretation of the second chapter of Genesis has had unfortunate consequences with regard to the subjection of women to men, and the dominion of men over the environment. Even in insisting that God created *ex nihilo*, the creationists are misinterpreting the beginning of Genesis, in which God is described as creating order out of chaos, rather than creating something from nothing. Also, the creationists downplay the fact that God is the sustainer, rather than just the creator, of the universe.

It is ironic that fundamentalist Christians and atheists both regard the Bible from the viewpoint of the Enlightenment, and see the topic of evolution as a battlefield. Atheists like Richard Dawkins claim that evolution occurs by blind chance, and that this provides a basis for their atheism. It is easy to show that they are wrong, and my Engineering Faculty colleague Neil Broom in his book "How Blind is the Watchmaker?" (Ashgate, 1998) has demonstrated this in detail very well.

I also find it ironic that forty years ago, when I was a member of the Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union, there was a general acceptance amongst British evangelical Christians that there was no conflict between Christian faith and an acceptance of the conclusion by scientists that evolution had occurred. It was seen that Genesis is concerned with "who" created the world and not "how" the world was created.

I conclude by listing some books, held in the Maclaurin Chapel library, that I have found helpful.

James Barr, "Escaping from Fundamentalism", SCM Press, 1984

R. J. Berry, "God and Evolution", Hodder & Stoughton, 1988