

IS CREATIONISM STILL VALID IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM?

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Creationism is not for the faint-hearted. It is based on a 3,500-year-old assertion found in the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1, NIV). Most contemporary scientists, however, believe that we are here as a result of a huge explosion of primeval matter billions of years ago. To believe in creation is to run against the tide.

“Nothing in biology,” wrote Dobzhansky, “makes sense except in the light of evolution.”¹ The editors of *Science* magazine, introducing a special issue on evolution, stated not long ago: “The intellectual concepts

arising from our understanding of evolution have enriched and changed many other fields of study.”² In the same issue, Stephen Jay Gould wrote: “Organic evolution [is] one of the firmest facts ever validated by science.”³

The standard creationist response to such declarations is to point out flaws in the evolutionary arguments. But creationists are at their best

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when they show that their explanations work better than those of evolutionists. Their goal should be to develop their paradigm so well that people will have to admit, “Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of creationism.”

With that as a background, consider a few aspects of Creationism still valid for 21st century thinking Christians.

Is Creationism a Religiously Motivated Paradigm?

Yes. Efforts to present creationism in a secular wrapping distort its central thrust. At the very core of creationism is the Creator. The Bible teaches that the Creator is intimately involved with nature, yet not part of nature. It follows that religion cannot be divorced from science. While science may be practiced without any reference to religion, the interpretation of such efforts may be flawed.

Of the great civilizations, the one in Western Europe gave rise to modern science, with emphasis on experimentation and mathematical formulations.⁴ Several cultures of antiquity, the Chinese and Arab among them, produced higher levels of learning and technology than medieval Europe. Yet it was in Europe that modern science was born. Heavily contributing to this was the Judeo-Christian faith, with its confidence in the laws of nature.

The supposed conflict between religion and science is a recent invention and a distortion of historical realities by a class of historians whose agenda was to destroy the influence of religion. The currently popular secularism in science may only be a detour in the history of science.

What are the Perceived Liabilities of Creationism?

Creationism originated in a pre-scientific world, where myths abounded. The biblical story of Creation is often compared with the Babylonian and other creation stories.

Creationism rests on the notion that there is a supernatural Being, which cannot be verified scientifically. Moreover, if this is true, then ours is a capricious world, subject to the whims of supernatural powers. Science is not equipped to study such a world.

Creationism restricts the range of inquiries, because by definition, there is no point studying the origins of life or the relationships between organisms.

Creationism implies accountability. Then humankind is not the supreme authority in the world.

The fact that a creation story exists in different ancient cultures suggests a common source for these stories.

The supreme Being of the Bible

created a world with laws that were either given or which can be discovered. Humans are mandated to subdue and care for creation, using these laws. There appears to be no caprice in the routine operation of nature. Nevertheless, the creationist paradigm permits divine intervention in nature, when known natural laws are superseded. Creationists believe that past divine interventions of great significance have been explained to humanity by special revelations. Modern science went astray when it discarded supernaturally revealed information relevant to science.

Whether the creationist paradigm is restrictive has to do with one's perspective. A person's understanding of reality will dictate his or her range of inquiry.

Is Science Hindered or Helped by Creationism?

The creationist worldview was a strong motivating factor for scientists to study nature—actually to experiment and see how God ran the world. These were the “voluntarist” scientists who opposed Aristotelianism (which held that the universe and everything in it had to be made by laws of logic that Aristotle himself discovered).

The biblical doctrine of creation assures us that we live in an orderly world ruled by the Supreme Lawgiver. This is in stark contrast to the pagan worldview, which saw nature

as alive and being moved by mysterious forces. Thus, the doctrine of creation was a positive and possibly decisive contributing factor to the birth of modern science.

Is there Explanatory Power in Creationism?

To a great extent, science is the process of explaining. The acid test for the value of a paradigm rests in its explanatory power. For example:

- Elements of design, seen in nature at every level, follow naturally from Creationism.
- The great diversity among organisms can be viewed as a reflection of the Creator's unbelievable range of imagination.
- Interaction and mutual support among organisms is a testimony to a benign design.

The burden to explain how living matter came into existence is lifted. So is the burden of having to connect every organism together through phylogenetic trees.

Creationism is helpful in light of the exceptional fidelity of genetic reproduction on the one hand and the very limited range of possible changes that can be accomplished by mutations. (It has now been shown, for example, that the bacterium *E. coli* remains *E. coli* even after thousands of generations in the laboratory.)

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Common features among organisms are understood to come from the same Designer. For example, similarities in metabolic pathways generate common metabolic needs, which can be satisfied by common food sources. Diverse features support the ability of organisms to fill different niches and to preserve their identities. Differences among organisms also reflect the Designer's obvious penchant for variations. Instead of asking how an organism is successful in carving a niche for itself, we ask, How does this species contribute to the good of the biosphere?

The puzzle of the chicken/egg is solved. The chicken came first.

The cause for existence, from atoms upward, is understood to be the expressed will of the Creator. The Adventist understanding of Creation emphasizes that the Creator was not dependent upon pre-existing matter. We hold that matter is not infinitely old, that it was created.

A characteristic of a designed entity is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Design and organization enable components of complex systems to cooperate for the expression of new functions. Layers of reality may be arranged to show the appearance of new functions at each successive level.

Predation, toxic plants, viruses, and the suffering and death of non-plant organisms do not fit into a scheme conceived by an all-wise Creator. The creationist paradigm assigns these to the work of an evil power in nature. This concept is

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most helpful when we consider the immense sophistication seen in the operation of living matter, all of which appears to go for naught—that is, to the eventual demise of the organism.

Can We Make Scientifically Testable Predictions Using the Creationist Paradigm?

Creationism has been criticized for not leading to testable predictions. Wrong paradigms may lead to testable suggestions, but that does not necessarily make for a good hypothesis. It makes it a testable hypothesis.

When a paradigm's prediction is tested and the results are different than predicted, sometimes the paradigm is altered, but often the test results are reinterpreted so as to allow for the continuation of the paradigm's validity. When the *Viking* Missions to Mars found no evidence for life on the Martian surface soil, even though microbial life was predicted by the chemical evolutionary paradigm, the adjustment was made to

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The creationist paradigm suggests that rather than creating a few species, the Creator generated a rich variety of living organisms. Therefore, it would be surprising to find planets populated with microorganisms alone.

Other predictions that follow from the creationist's position are:

- The biosphere is complete. No new orders of organisms are expected to arise. (The creationist paradigm nevertheless is comfortable with new species arising within the same order.) All current organisms have recognizable ancestors.
- No living organisms will arise abiotically.
- The fossil record will suggest a rich variety of organisms coexisting from the beginning.

Theological Insights From Creationism

Science cannot be divorced from religion. Theologians must not give up the realm of physical reality

entirely to the scientist. They may not be able to contribute to the understanding of how physical realities operate in nature, but they have a grave responsibility to advise scientists on the clearest meaning of supernatural information that has bearing on science.

To illustrate this, we may imagine a scientist from elsewhere in the universe visiting Earth a week after its creation. Not being told of the recent creation event, and observing mature organisms and well developed trees in the Garden of Eden, this well-meaning scientist would conclude that Earth had been around for some time. The conflict regarding the age of the Earth is caused by the fact that dating techniques all but ignore the possibility of a mature Earth appearing suddenly.

Humanity is accountable to the Creator for the way we utilize nature's resources. The Creator's wisdom and sophistication are documented by countless examples in nature. It needs to be emphasized that He is not only the Designer of the world, where objects and organisms are integrated into a coherent setting, but He also brought all of it into existence and has sustained it for thousands of years. Contrast this with the famous "Biosphere" experiments, which showed how difficult it is to balance ecological systems.

Even though we do not have a complete understanding of how our world fits into the rest of the universe, and what kinds of contribution we can make to it, there can be no doubt that the existence of our world has a purpose.

The Adventist worldview is based on the profound theme of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. The Bible tells that in the last days, Satan will work mightily to deceive the world. A facet of this deception may be the theory of evolution.

Creationism is a robust paradigm, fully capable of undergirding the scientific enterprise in the new millennium. Wider acceptance of creationism by the scientific community in the future will depend, in part, on how well theologians can convince scientists of the priceless value of revealed information. In addition, this approach will gain greater credibility as more scientists conduct research on the basis of the creationist perspective. □

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