



Why Won't Creationists Just Give Up?

by Adrian Miller

This is a sentiment I have encountered on numerous occasions. Why don't you just give up? Surely, there is so much scientific evidence in favour of evolution? Surely, the biblical text doesn't demand that we understand creation as taking place over a few days just a few thousand years ago? Why don't you abandon your medieval ideas and take a leap into the real world, where creationism is embarrassing, and actually puts people off embracing the gospel of Jesus? That sort of thing.

Sometimes I have met with total incredulity that a fully trained and ordained Anglican clergyman, like myself, could possibly entertain such backward thinking. With this in mind, I addressed a group of clergy last year under the title "Why Won't Creationists Just Give Up?" And I gave some reasons why we don't give up.

A Few Headline Reasons

Because we see the empirical data from the sciences fitting so much better within a creationist framework and using creationist models. Because we see as inadequate any hermeneutic that treats Genesis as having nothing to say about earth history, biology, palaeo-anthropology, and so on. Because we recognise the deistic theology and naturalistic philosophy on which Darwin built his biological ideas, and which seeps into our thinking if we embrace Darwin. Because we recognise the importance of revelation in our approach to knowing.

Because we appreciate the 'Emperor's New Clothes', sociological factors that pressurise members of our society – especially the intellectual elite – to conform to this world, in opposition to Paul's teaching in Romans 12:1-2. Because history tells us that where the church

has embraced Darwin, it has been weakened. Because Satan has provided people with a way of looking at the world that doesn't need God, and we need to expose the weaknesses in that proposition rather than compromise with it.

Because, far from being bad for mission, creationism provides the best apologetical approach, and makes for the deepest disciples. Incidentally, this isn't to say that we don't have our work cut out convincing "Greek thinkers" that our message of the cross is not foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:22f) – it just means that it's even more important that we present a united front on these issues.

A New Question – Not Why But How?

All in all, there are good theological, philosophical, sociological, biological, geological, cosmological, anthropological, epistemological, missional, spiritual and scientific reasons why we creationists won't just give up. But that's not what I want to write about here. There is an even more pressing question that has been taxing me of late, and it is not a "why" question. It is a "how" question. How do we represent our strongest reasons for holding our position amongst those who oppose us? How do we get a meaningful conversation going, that engages with the strongest arguments on both sides of the debates? Let me explain what led me to this question and what answers I've begun to consider, before offering an invitation to get involved.

1. The Disconnected Need Connecting

I am a great believer in listening. I love sane and sensible debate and good quality representation of ideas, passionately held and clearly articulated. So, when at vicar school, my study led me to try to engineer a

conversation between creationism and mainstream theology, I was really quite dismayed. So much of the mainstream theological texts on Genesis barely even acknowledge that a creationist position exists, let alone engage with specific creationist arguments. Conversely, some of the material in the theological literature raised interesting and valid questions which weren't often addressed at depth in the creationist literature.

Trying to generate a conversation between creationism and mainstream theology was like trying to generate a conversation between people of different languages, talking about different topics. It was difficult. Early in my research it became apparent that there was a disconnect. Certainly there were some commendable creationist theological offerings, from the likes of Douglas Kelly, Andy McIntosh, Andrew Kulikovsky and others, but with some issues there was more work to be done by creationists.

On the other side, one well-known theological educator, who adopts a 'literary-cultural' theistic evolutionary approach, and has tried to engage with creationist views, admitted in personal correspondence that many Old Testament scholars deliberately avoid creationist arguments because it is seen as too much of a minefield. I discovered in the theological literature that there was much misunderstanding and apathy toward creationists, and where creationist concerns were addressed, it was very often in the form of 'straw men' arguments being presented and knocked down.

One could be forgiven for thinking that the community of theological educators in our country would rather that creationists went away and hid somewhere. My college library,

interestingly, very well equipped with books on many a topic, had almost no creationist literature at all. To research my topic, I had to buy a lot of my own books. So, what of my generation of vicars-in-training who don't make the effort to seek out our under-represented view? Most will only ever hear the arguments from one side, and if they do ever check out some creationist material and find it doesn't address the points they learnt at college, they may not take a second look.

There is a serious disconnection that is crying out for robust and serious engagement. This doesn't mean just publishing books at each other. This means direct representative dialogue, as each side faces the strongest points of concern.

2. The Call of God Needs Following

I've known God's call on me to minister somehow in this area for some years. In seeking God for how He is calling me to work out my creationist convictions in ministry, I have begun to feel that a local focus is insufficient. It is encouraging to see individuals locally wake up to a different way of looking at the world that engenders confidence in the Bible, and passion for mission and ministry. Yet, the struggle so often seems to be against a much broader context, especially – dare I say it – in the good old Church of England.

There are many Anglican voices, bishops, theological educators, scientifically trained academics, who urge us to reject creationism and embrace an ahistorical hermeneutic with regard to the early chapters of Genesis. This creates difficulty for some in accepting creationism or in being seen as creationists. As an Anglican clergyman I can sometimes feel quite isolated and belittled for having such 'medieval ideas'. But with estimates of between 5% and 10% of clergy holding creationist views, perhaps I am not so alone.

But I am isolated. And I know a

few others who feel a little isolated in these shared convictions too. And when we look at the *Faraday Institute*, the work of *BioLogos* and others, we find that our opponents are gathering themselves and promoting their views quite well. This gives us a tremendous opportunity. If we can gather ourselves, and begin to engage with one another, and determine to reject the stereotypes and 'straw men' arguments, then this could be good.

The call of God comes to gather creationists, especially those with a love for and understanding of Anglicanism, wherein this opposing context is perhaps most to be found. This gathered forum could offer a strategically vital function just now. It could give a representative voice, both to listen and respond to the strengths of opposing views and to push for solid engagement with the strengths of the creationist arguments. The creationist agenda is incalculably important for mission and ministry in our current world, and we have before us an opportunity to address it.

3. Representation Needs Collaboration

This whole area is hugely interdisciplinary, with pertinent issues coming from philosophy, sociology, theology and various branches of science, so although there is a central singular debate, there are so many sub-debates, and such complexity, that it is impossible for this task to be undertaken by any individual. This needs to be a collective enterprise, with a truly representative body providing a voice.

I've spoken to a number of creationists from different educational institutions, different creationist organisations as well as ordained and lay who take a real interest in this vital area. I would love to gather a committed core from across the UK, who could meet in person once or twice a year, and maintain regular contact between times, as well as compiling a good representative body of supporters for consultation.

Yes, we have good reasons for not just giving up. But how do we ensure those reasons are given a fair hearing among the influential thought-stewards of our time? How do we ensure we are doing our bit in engaging with the strengths of those who oppose us and lead others to do likewise? Surely, the first thing is by collaborating. By gathering and organising ourselves. I know this is already happening in different ways, but my conviction is that there is a place for a new focused representative forum.

God said to Jeremiah: "Call unto me and I will show you great and mighty things which you have not known." Let's do it!

Considering The Next Step

If you are interested in being involved in such a venture, or if you have any other thoughts or comments on what I have written, I would be delighted to hear from you. Perhaps you are an Anglican, ordained or lay, who has been praying for years for there to be some creationist movement from within. I'd especially love to hear from you! This isn't about knocking the Anglican church, though. It is about drawing the people of God together, to try to learn together where the great deceiver has led us astray, and to experience in greater depth an answer to that prayer of Jesus in John 17: "Sanctify them by the truth – your word is truth."

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