

CREATION VS. EVOLUTION

23 Things to Consider if Christians Want to Think About and Intelligently Discuss This Issue

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The issue is complex in the best of circumstances. What we conclude about it for many of us, will affect significant choices we make, and how we think, and how we live. Yet I've found many Christians "talking past each other" in trying to sort things out. Why? Sometimes they are missing key information. Sometimes their "facts" are bad, or what they've been told by people they trust is too generalized or out of date. Sometimes their assumptions and sources are faulty.

To try to help, here are some principles and understandings I have collected over the years in reading and studying, of teaching in the university (SUNY), in high school, middle school, and elementary school, in writing science textbooks (Silver Burdett), and, in particular, as an elder teaching high school Sunday school in the C&MA church. My Ph.D. is in science education (Western Michigan Univ.).

As Christian we must think as we honor and worship God and serve others. I hope these guidelines and principles help you to do that.

(Please excuse the unevenness here; I consider this a working draft, not a finished document... Be aware that I'm not trying re-say the obvious, just underline some key points.)

1. We must separate basic questions into 2 categories:

(a) Questions that separate believers from nonbelievers (Jesus is the Son of God, rose from the dead, salvation is only in him, etc.) and (b) Questions that believers have different views about (endtimes scenarios, mode of baptism, etc.)

We may, and should, discuss these things among ourselves, and we may subject ourselves to creeds and certain limitations, such as the U. S. Christian & Missionary Alliance holds to the premillennial view of endtimes, and while that may be discussed in C&MA churches, we can and should expect preachers and teachers in U.S. C&MA churches to (humbly) advocate that view. *But when we talk among ourselves, we should be careful to realize what's at stake, and not build walls between believers where none should be.*

2. There exists what is called *general* revelation and *special* revelation. Both are from God. General revelation includes learnings from science, history, research, experience, etc. which may be unearthed by Christians and unbelievers alike. (I am certain I would prefer a well-trained atheistic orthopedic surgeon, rather than a born-again first aid worker, to put back together my smashed leg. What the surgeon has learned, whether he recognizes it or not, has been allowed by God.) Special revelation is the Bible, a source that tells us things that we can learn nowhere else. The Bible, we believe, is inspired, is true, and without error as originally received. It tells us God is eternal, loving, saving, etc. and that he made the world.

3. We can *misinterpret* either general or special revelation. (And Christians and unbelievers have done this for centuries. As we learn more, we better understand.)

4. When talking about creation/evolution there are *two* large issues. To have meaningful discussion we must keep these separate. (1) What caused change to come about? Or, Is Darwinism a satisfactory explanation for how change has come about? If not, then what? Or the question may be framed: (1) *Is matter and energy, accident, chance, and mutation all that is, or did God precede and create everything?* [A variant here is the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, which asks whether or not scientific evidence reflects the result of some “creation design” or the effort of some “supernatural designer” rather than a materialist/naturalist mechanism acting alone. This is what some desire to be the nature of debate in public schools since it leaves “God” out of the conversation.] (Also, a subquestion here is, *Does God control and direct* how things go as well?) **And (2) How long did it take from the creation (or beginning) until now?** *How one answers the first question is one that separates Christians from unbelievers. How one answers the second does not* (or should not).

5. Quite frankly, Christians are divided, often with strong feelings, about the length of time it took to get from creation to where we are now. Much of this comes from misinformation and a refusal to look at “good” information. (I am in no way against home schooling, but *if* a decision to home school stems mainly from a fear of looking at facts, then I think that’s very sad.) I am what many definitions (and there are many!) would call a “progressive creationist,” “a day-age creationist,” or an “old earth creationist,” but *not* a “gap theory creationist” (where millions and billions of years are effectively “dumped” between Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2) or a “theistic evolutionist” (who essentially mythologizes the first 11 chapters of Genesis). To simplify, I will lump these varieties of views (except the gap theory and theistic evolution) into “old earth creationism” (OEC) in my comments which follow. (OEC will stand for “Old Earth Creationism” or “Old Earth Creationist” in what follows, depending on context. OEC has no basic problem with most current interpretations of *length of time* made by most modern scientists. Neither do I)

6. *Young Earth Creationists* (YEC) [meaning YE “creationist,” or “creationism” in what follows], many of whom are members of, or have close ties to, the Institute of Creation Research (ICR), believe that the earth (and everything else) is no older than 6000 years, though some will say 10,000 years. While many YEC

advocates are gracious in what they say, some are not, and some will insist that you “must accept a young earth view to really believe in the Bible” —or “God,” or “to be saved,” etc.

7. Don’t buy the “I take the Bible *literally* and you don’t” response that some YEC people offer. Or “I just take the Bible for what it says.” There is much figurative and symbolic portions of Scripture. When Jesus said “I am the door,” he was not (I’m convinced) referring to himself as xylem, phloem, and cellulose, but rather he was a “way” to be “entered” or “chosen.” Much of Psalms is figurative, and certainly Revelation. There’s even a fable in the Bible! Check it out (Jud. 9:7-20). Be sure what you mean when you say “literal.” Nicodemus had a problem with Jesus in understanding “born again” because he was taking things literally when he shouldn’t be. One principle of interpretation is to look for the “natural” meaning of what is said. When Jesus turned water into wine, it seems obvious that a miraculous chemical change took place.

8. Be aware that many, many good books and articles have been written which advocate OEC views. Hugh Ross’s website (www.reasons.org) is a place to start gathering sources. Also check www.ibri.org of the Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute and www.asa3.org of the American Scientific Affiliation. For Westminster Theological Seminary’s statement on the length of the days of creation consult www.wts.edu/news/creation.html. For a Young Earth comparison check www.answersingenesis.org and www.creationresearch.org. Although YEC information is often presented in fancier format, I do not recommend these last two because often they unfairly represent science and its connection with biblical truth. But check and compare the quality of information for yourself.

9. Be aware that many, many Bible-believing Christian organizations and colleges either advocate, or are sincerely open to considering OEC views as acceptable Christian theology. Among these are (and please correct me if I’m a bit dated here, or some new changes have occurred that I’m not aware of): The important detailed 1978 Chicago Statement on biblical inerrancy (see www.bible-researcher.com/chicago1.html) produced by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) that was signed by nearly 300 evangelical scholars deliberately left open the issue of the length of the days of creation. IBRI, ASA, Nyack College, Houghton College, Wheaton College, Taylor University, Seattle Pacific University, etc. etc. either advocate or are open to OEC views. Further, historic creeds and the statements of faith of most present denominations and individual churches (including the C&MA) are open to, or are deliberately silent about, OEC views. Churches which object to OEC, for the most part, are smaller, and “independent,” and often, I feel, are those which have not seriously thought through the length of creation time, or have been steamrolled by guest presentations by visiting YEC people with slick presentations on their own view. Be aware that several ICR lecturers are gifted speakers and, having spoken hundreds of times in many different forums, can overwhelm people who are not well versed in science. *Many “points” made in “bumper sticker” fashion by YEC presenters are not documented from good sources, or are from very dated second- or third-hand reports from popular magazines or leaflets. Check sources for YEC claims. And check the dates of the information cited.* One example of poor support for an assertion is the

“Paluxy footprints of dinosaurs and people together” that some still cite to support young earth theory, even though the Institute of Creation Research (ICR) in its publication Jan. 1986 *Acts and Facts* finally admitted that claims previously made were too weak to use further and should be dropped. Yet I have heard the “Paluxy” argument advocated in a FL church as recently as 2004. Also YEC often point to “studies” which show that a radiometric dating procedure made glaring errors in two or three cases about estimating the age of earth materials. (Their point: How can we ever trust radiometric dating?) What they will not, and most probably cannot, do is show the hundreds and hundreds of cases where—at least 3—separate dating methods did not make errors, and agreed with each other in making OE age determinations.

10. When talking about evolution, *define the term*. That is absolutely necessary, because “bait and switch” arguments are commonly used (sometimes ignorantly, sometimes deliberately, by both YEC and atheistic scientists). *Evolution* means change, and everyone agrees that creatures change over time. The issue is what is the magnitude of change that is possible by environmental pressure acting *alone*. To discuss this, many scientists who are Christians reject *macroevolution*, or “large” changes between different kinds of animals, and accept *microevolution* for some smaller changes within species. Generally, OEC Christians reject macroevolution, but accept microevolution. (Please realize I’m greatly simplifying this!)

11. The word *day* in Genesis 1. OEC Christians insist that this word can be a long period of time. Be aware that a lot has been written about this, so don’t just buy into a slick, open-and-closed argument that day has to be 24 hours, or 12 because of the language. Many scholars allow, even encourage, the use of “day” as longer than 24 hours. (Even in English we often use it for a long period of time. “Back in the day when people used trains...”)

12. Let us be careful not to make the Bible say things it does not say. We can interpret and “infer,” even attempt to persuade, but let us be honest and humble as we do it, and above all, not wall off or stigmatize those who do not agree with us.

13. Rejecting YEC is not the same thing as embracing Darwinism. Both YEC and OEC are NOT Darwinian. Darwinism is a whole different issue (which basically I’m not addressing here).

14. Be aware that a related issue here is whether or not “Noah’s Flood” (“God’s Flood,” actually...) was a global or local phenomenon. There are Christians on both sides of this and much has been written about it. (“Whole world” could be “whole known world,” or whole world where there were people, because it seems clear that all people except Noah and his family died, etc. etc.) Be aware that *there is no commonly accepted geological evidence to support a single, global universal flood*. Of course, as a miracle, God can do anything. But if God actually used a single flood to wipe everything out all over planet earth, He miraculously erased every bit of evidence for it! The thousands

of layers of sedimentary rocks all over the planet, and the detailed array of fossils in them, argue strongly for millions and billions of years to lay them down, not a one-year flood.

15. When reading *anything* written about these matters, check out the writer’s background, and the publisher. There’s an astonishing number of very, very dated scientific materials, and “old arguments” that are wrong, out of date, and are not accepted by those today advocating either YEC or OEC views. (See #9 above.) There are many caring, concerned, gifted Christian presenters who travel from church to church presenting essentially a “canned” set of information often headlined, “Creation vs. Evolution—which is true?” Quickly one gets to, “God’s way? Or Man’s way?” And, quite frankly, it’s hard to refute reported “studies” or “discoveries” that are not published, or are not easy to locate. “Mistakes and bad assumptions have been made in radiometric dating,” we’re told. How can a person educated in science, but still a nonscientist, successfully refute that, empty-handed in a church pew? Just for the record, radiometric dating is overwhelmingly accepted by the science community. Further, there are many evidences for old age of the earth that have nothing to do with radiometric dating techniques. Those who have curiosity and should read about these things, especially those written by Christians who have devoted their lives to Bible study and science.

16. Be aware that most creation/evolution issues that become public policy issues have become so because of the insistence of YEC people who want “young earth views” to be given “equal time” with old earth (standard) views. This is a bad approach, I feel, which not only builds walls between Christians and unbelievers, but between Christians and Christians. The issue that Christians should fight for in the public schools should involve opposing the growing trend to teach that “evolution is proven fact,” (again, note the absence of definitions!) or the insistence of many science teachers in saying—and this has religious overtones—that Darwinism or “scientific naturalism” is the only honest way to explain origins and change. Most Christians, many who are afraid of science, fail to realize that there are *no solid, convincing scientific proofs for the mechanisms* that naturalistic scientists “believe” caused the changes, especially the biological changes, that have taken place since the beginning.

17. Consequently, be aware that many OEC Christians are enormously frustrated by many public policy issues because of the YEC overlay. OEC people strongly agree with some concerns brought by Christians in many creation/evolution debates, but strongly disagree with other concerns. Since some of the YEC arguments they find embarrassing, OEC people often just avoid the fray. That’s unfortunate for everyone.

18. Be aware that there is a very strong negative reaction among “groups” of scientists and science professors (secular colleges, science departments, science organizations, etc.) to *absolutely anything* that smacks of “religion.” This reaction is commonly ridiculing or engaging in *ad hominem* attack, or snickercrit (ignoring and laughing at the message and the messenger and those he associates with). Very little reading about religion and Christianity (in particular) and where it may interface with science has been done by secular scientists on their own because most don’t consider it worth their time.

19. Further, perhaps 80 to 90% of secular (often atheistic) scientists automatically (wrongly) connect YEC views with every creation “confrontation.” Be aware, too, that most secular people in science are almost totally ignorant of OEC views. To them, being a Christian “who takes the Bible seriously” ipso facto means buying into the YEC view. No wonder Christianity is such a turn-off to many of them! Hugh Ross (of Reasons to Believe) reports of many science-trained people coming to salvation in Christ when they realize that belief in the Bible does not require accepting YEC views.

20. The “Big Bang Theory” is very hostile to YEC views, but is very friendly, and foundational, to, OEC views.

21. Keep your eyes open for discussion about *intelligent design*. This is a most exciting new framework that is being written about now by scientists who are Christians who are studying origins. Though the media will rarely admit it, ID advocates are first and foremost interested in *what do scientific data really say, or imply?* Religion is not the issue, honesty is. And, by the way, there are some brilliant men from UCLA, Harvard, Yale, Univ. of Chicago, Oxford, etc. who are proponents of, and are writing about, Intelligent Design. Yes, it’s friendly to the Bible (OEC interpretations) and Christianity, but that’s not the real issue in the public school debates. Again, the issue is being honest in looking at scientific research.

22. Hugh Ross (a Christian astrophysicist) is an outstanding “evangelist” to scientists. He accepts Intelligent Design, but goes much further in Biblical application. He is not the best source for arguments for including ID instruction in the public schools. That just confuses things. Yes, one advocating ID might well think about finding out what we know about the candidates for “designer.” But that’s not the issue, or shouldn’t be the issue, in public science classrooms.

23. Here’s what I consider the bottom line in talking with people today in our churches, Christian organizations, and schools: (1) *We must strongly and gently insist that the Bible is true and inerrant, (2) that God created all that exists and, further, that he directs and sustains it, (3) that Genesis reports history, not myth, and (4) that we must allow room for Christians who accept either the YEC or OEC views.* There are serious, Bible-loving, born-again believers on both sides of this issue. We must admit this, and work together to do God’s business, and not be distracted by other issues.

We are called to *understand* as best as we are able (I. Pet. 3:15). But first and foremost we are called to worship God and serve others. Part of this—for some of us— involves reaching out to address matters as I have here. Hence the importance of proclaiming #4 (above in 23) in connecting with each other, and helping others come to terms with what they perceive as a very difficult issue. And let me repeat, if one has an OEC framework, there are marvelous things happening, and beginning to happen, in the intellectual world today.