

Quo Vadis? Some Reflections on the State of Creationism

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In C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, the Pevensie children must have felt like outsiders in Narnia. All four of them—Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy—were strangers in a strange land. I can relate as a relative newcomer to young earth creationism. I only joined the movement eight years ago. Before 2023, I had never attended a creationist conference, nor have I ever written anything for ICR, AiG, CMI, or CRS. I lack the pedigree of many creationist stalwarts who have toiled for decades during a long and bitter winter. So, you may wonder, who am I to be giving these remarks?

Thanks for asking. I'm a systematic theologian from the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), and I'm a young-age creationist. I believe in six literal creation days, a universe 6–10,000 years old, and a past global flood. I hold many other convictions related to creationism that are controversial in academia today but fully within the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy down the ages. I have many friends and colleagues who are old earth creationists and theistic evolutionists, and I dream of a day when they will all be young-age creationists. Creationism, after all, is the most compelling theological synthesis of the biblical witness—or so I would argue.

In what follows, I offer some reflections on the state of creationism today, warts and all. What is the future of the creationist¹ movement in 2025? My remarks focus on five areas of concern that keep me awake at night. These musings are offered with some fear and trembling, knowing my biases and limitations, and that some creationists will not agree with all my insights. Yet I hope they stimulate fruitful dialogue among creation scientists and theologians.

I. The Quirks of Personality

If you spend any time with creationists, you are probably all too familiar with weird personality quirks.² These men and women can be sharp-edged, prickly, and combative in personality. They can take offense easily. They can be difficult to work with. Even when you're squarely on their side, they are too often hyper-sensitive,

thinking you're somehow out to get them. They are predictably skeptical of the conclusions of "mainstream science," but their skepticism is pervasive, extending even to fellow creationists. They end up distrustful of the motives and intentions of other creationists and their ministries.

One of my friends, a creationist, is unwilling to change his views on any theological position, even when it is objectively the right thing to do.³ He suffers from what I call "cognitive" or "intellectual" self-righteousness. He knows creationism is the kosher position and that non-creationists are wrong on the main points. So far so good. But then he acts as if everything he believes, every position he holds, must be correct, and that a non-creationist can't be right on any substantive issues. This way of thinking is false. I know many creationists who believe things that are demonstrably untrue, and they could learn a great deal from non-creationists.

Let us refer to these traits, loosely, as "personality quirks." I hasten to add that my descriptions are generalizations, even familiar stereotypes, but they have more basis in reality than we might like to admit. At any rate, one can understand why such quirks arise. Creationist scientists live in a world ceaselessly nagging that your views are shameful, impossible, downright ridiculous. Christian non-creationists share the sentiment; they accept you as a fellow believer but are embarrassed that you claim to be a scientist. In this environment, it's no surprise that creationists can be prickly and combative. Odds are most people in the same situation would end up surly, tightly wound, bent out of shape.

If you're a creationist scientist and you've done significant work, you are likely a pioneer. You're an independent thinker. Given your strong personality, you're stubborn and probably not known for being a team player. Of course, there are happy exceptions to these stereotypes, especially in the younger generation. My point is that when I meet a creationist with an angular personality, I always feel sympathy.

However, if we are biblical, Christ-centered creationists, we should not be known *primarily* as people with strange personality quirks.⁴ Rather we should have reputations of being Christians who are at once passionate about our theological views but also calm and cheerful—*because the truth is on our side*. Let them mock us. Let them marginalize us. Let them critique us. Let them make fun of us. "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Pet. 3:9).⁵ Jesus is our model for how to respond to opposition. His enemies mocked him. They persecuted him. They beat him. They ultimately killed him—yet he never struck back.

Same with the apostles. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:24–27, "Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked." Elsewhere Paul says: "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil. 4:12). Taking our cues from Jesus and the apostles, we creationists should be people who exemplify passion, fortitude, and—when the going gets tough—equanimity under duress.

But one final point on personality quirks: we should distinguish *eccentric* from *awkward*. Every movement has eccentric personalities (so-called oddballs). It's probably fair to say that creationism has a higher proportion of such people. In my view, eccentrics are part of the beautiful diversity of the local church that stands head and shoulders above any other human institution. I do not think it wise or realistic to expect, much less demand, eccentrics to "change." We should happily include such men and women in creationism and be

ready to listen for their occasional moments of insight that others miss. Yet we should not let such eccentric members unduly influence how we function as a movement.

The bigger problem, however, lies with those creationists who tend to be awkward—they are individualists and struggle to work with others. This issue is prevalent in creationism for the reasons mentioned already. Creationism as a movement needs “team players” and leaders who can handle the occasional disagreements within the “team.” Awkwardness is a character trait that can be addressed and improved upon. At an individual level, we should all resist the Devil’s temptations to fall back into combative modes of being: Keep reading widely. Keep reading people from different perspectives. Don’t just read fellow creationists or even “conservative” Christians. Read people you disagree with. Read people who hate creationism—not merely to refute them; that’s easy. Rather, read to expose your cultural and theological blind spots. Don’t just read; get to know Christians who think differently from you. Engage in dialogue. Cultivate friendship.⁶ Sanctification comes from the most unlikely places.

The most effective remedy, however, is to integrate creationism fully into the life and ministry of the local church. This should be a key component of our future vision. For too long, creationism has suffered from being centered around single-issue, parachurch ministries, which left unchecked can foster imbalance and quirkiness. Healthy churches with healthy structures of discipline provide the context in which creationists mature in character and grow in grace as we relate to one another. Of course, no local church is perfect here; even those sympathetic to creationism need to see creationism as integral to normal Christianity rather than an apologetic side-issue for the misfits.

II. Peace With Other Creationists

True confession: I have mixed feelings about standard creationist ministries. While some of them are helpful, typically they don’t put creationism in the best light. I dislike the tone, the conduct, the infighting, the hyper-polemics—all of it. I don’t often see the grace and truth of Jesus. Creationism deserves better. However, my disillusionment has frequently led me to be dismissive of creationist ministries in conversation with others. I realize in retrospect that I’ve spoken in disparaging and even hurtful ways about them. The problem is not my concerns with their approach; it’s the *way* I expressed them.

Ironically, I am far closer theologically to Christians connected with ICR, AiG, and other creationist ministries than I am with most theologians in academia. Take Ken Ham as an example: I dislike some of the ways he represents creationism (and he may feel the same way about me!). But aside from being a fellow creationist, he is my dear brother in Christ. Ham and other creationist apologists have been defending creationism consistently in the face of extreme hostility from the culture and the church. Almost single-handedly and for decades they kept creationism front and center for millions of lay believers around the world; like a thorn in the flesh, Christians in academia kept having to deal with the arguments of these creationists. I am grateful God often uses creationist ministries to edify his people and glorify his name.

In the field of modern creationism, I find it helpful to see ministries like AiG, ICR, CMI, and others as operating *in a particular lane*. They are parachurch ministries oriented to educating laypeople in apologetics, evangelism, and the Christian life with a wide range of print and online media. While creationists like me have concerns, we must still recognize God can use such ministries, sometimes in significant ways. Be careful you don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater and find yourself resisting what God is doing. As the Pharisee Gamaliel says in another context, “if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God” (Acts 5:38). I am preaching especially to myself here.

That said, creationist ministries are not blameless. They tend to be narrow, inflexible, and overly dogmatic. It is as if they fear challenge or disagreement from others. They double down in reaction and hold their views more stringently, even when those views are not as clear as they think, and even when other creationists can reasonably disagree. This is a sign of fragility and insecurity, not faithfulness. Worse yet, the real issue for some individuals may be their big egos—in a word, sin.

Others have voiced the same concerns. Logos Research Associates (LogosRA), for instance, a creationist organization founded by John Sanford, has published a set of principles to guide their ministry, including how they approach fellowship with non-creationists and other creationists with whom they disagree. On this last point, they include a letter from Gordon Wilson, Senior Fellow of Natural History at New Saint Andrews College. He writes:

It is apparent to us that division in the creation apologetics movement is widespread and at times there has been clear evidence of ungodly actions and sinful anger. Disagreement is not our problem; discord is. . . . Not only does it displease our Lord when we YEC creationists are not on speaking terms with each other, it is a poor testimony to the watching world. Will they know we are Christians by our love or by how staunchly we refuse to make things right? We think it is impossible to reconcile because it is impossible to get them to admit they're wrong and I'm right about a particular creationist model or ministry philosophy. We are sure the enemy is quite pleased at the growth of the root of bitterness that he has cultivated in the YEC community over these years.⁷

The rest of the letter is in the same spirit.

More recently, the Creation Theology Society (CTS) sounded the alarm bells in 2023 in an online document titled "A Call to Unity" garnering a list of creationist signatories. The document was prompted by a growing alarm over the rank divisiveness emanating from certain sectors of creationism. I quote from two of the nine commitments:

As servants of Jesus Christ, we have the privilege and responsibility to cultivate Christlikeness in our interactions with one another. In our exchange of ideas and investigations of both biblical and scientific data, a gracious and irenic spirit should motivate and undergird our posture and our manner of engagement (Ephesians 4:1–3). . . . As we enter into discussions, present our papers, and publish our findings, we should season our words with grace, love, and respect for fellow believers no matter how much we might disagree with one another (Proverbs 16:24).⁸

Evidently LogosRA and CTS feel compelled to urge all creationists to be consistently Christ-centered in word and deed.

Of course, throughout his ministry Jesus was often scathing toward the Pharisees and Sadducees in their hypocrisy and legalism (e.g., Matt. 23:1–36; Mark 7:1–13; Luke 11:37–54). He opposed the moneychangers when he violently overturned their tables (Matt. 21:12–13). Sometimes he had harsh rebuke for people close to him (e.g., Mark 8:31–33; Luke 8:22–25). The apostles were hardly different, as when Paul warned the Galatians against apostasy (Gal. 1:6–10) and rebuked the Corinthians for tolerating sexual immorality (1 Cor. 5:1–13). The list goes on—clearly there are times we should firmly oppose error in fellow Christians. But we should always be striving for the right balance and doing things with the right motive. As Rhyne Putman notes, "Correction is for the building up of the individual or party in the wrong (2 Tim. 3:17), not for acclamation or scoring points. It must also be epitomized by kindness, gentleness, and forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Prov. 15:1)."⁹

Dietrich Bonhoeffer coined the phrase "cheap grace" for Christians who love to champion God's grace but

without repentance or transformation. “Cheap grace,” he wrote, “is the deadly enemy of our Church. . . . Cheap grace therefore amounts to a denial of the living Word of God, in fact, a denial of the Incarnation of the Word of God.”¹⁰ It is using justification by grace through faith as a license for sinning. By analogy, we should diagnose a disease called *cheap creationism*. What are the symptoms?

I am guilty of cheap creationism when I defend my position tooth and nail with little evidence of Jesus and the fruit of the Spirit. I care more about the rightness of my views than about Christian character. Creationists with this affliction are driven by a Javert-like resolve, an obsession, to discredit or marginalize the work of other creationists. Such hyper-critical fault-finding is not only counterproductive, but it drives people further away from creationism. Cheap creationism is rampant on social media platforms where the name of Jesus is maligned by misguided Christians who use words as a weapon against their opponents (James 3:1–18).

Christocentric creationism prioritizes what we believe *and how we live* (1 Tim. 4:16), which includes how we treat other people, not least fellow creationists we disagree with. The gospel constrains us to die to pride and status. Jesus exhorts us to be Christians with a calm, cheerful, and quiet confidence in our theology, always tempered with humility. But this starts from the top—it must come from the leadership of the creationist movement so that lay believers, who inevitably take their cues from us, imitate a grace-based, Spirit-filled creationism.

The relevant point is this: *not all disagreements are equally serious*. Not all differences of opinion are heretical. Christians throughout church history acknowledged some notion of “dogmatic rank,” the idea that “teachings need to be ranked, and the ranking has to do with importance for faithfulness and fellowship. Not all teachings we hold have the same importance, although all biblical teaching is important.”¹¹ Playing fast and loose with core doctrines like justification or the resurrection is dangerous, potentially damnable, but other disagreements do not rise to that level. As creationists, we need to recognize such distinctions in our intramural debates; otherwise, we risk devouring ourselves and thus undermining our own cause. If every disagreement we have with other young-age creationists automatically means they are now “liberal” or have bought into evolutionary assumptions—presumably hook, line, and sinker—then we are in trouble.¹²

I am not saying creationists should never engage in healthy debate or disagreement. There is a time and place for dispute. But it’s one thing to raise concerns to a fellow creationist in private discussion or to publish a technical article raising questions about a position, but cordially without animosity. However, it’s quite another thing to post incendiary diatribes designed to blacklist fellow creationists because they think differently from you. That kind of bullying will never adorn the truth of the gospel (Titus 2:10). All creationists must do better, especially those with a big audience and following.

III. The Promise of the New Creationism

In evangelicalism, the relationship between church and academia is always fragile. Believers often have a dismissive view of academic institutions as embodying all the sins of secularism. This sentiment runs deep in American history and culture.¹³ The “conservative” wing of American Protestantism often has a smug anti-intellectualism suspicious of universities and PhDs. While I disavow this attitude, I recognize there’s much to criticize about academic institutions. Anti-biblical ideologies are taught and defended in lecture halls across the country.

At the same time, we should recognize the vital role that Christian colleges, seminaries, and parachurch ministries affiliated with academic institutions play in the lives of believers. Influential professors train and mentor our young people. Our seminaries train future pastors who will be leading churches and shaping the

next generation. *What such institutions are saying about creationism matters a lot.*

The reality is this. Most professors at these institutions have an extremely low view of creationist ministries. They find them intellectually embarrassing, distasteful, and dishonoring to the Lord. Some readers will be thinking: “well, prof, they’re liberals—that’s why they don’t like creationist ministries.” With all due respect, that is a lazy response. It is true that professors often accept old-earth and evolutionary perspectives, hence their disagreement with creationist ministries. However, we cannot ignore the ambiguous legacy of creationist organizations.

On the one hand, such organizations have done much positive good. God has used them in the lives of many people. Give credit where credit is due. On the other hand, we must speak frankly about their shortcomings and limitations (see above). They operate in a particular lane oriented towards equipping lay people. Such ministries, for good or ill, tend to use rhetoric that oversimplifies and sometimes demonizes the other side. As a result, their arguments are perceived by non-creationists (and many creationists!) as uncritical, imbalanced, and lacking nuance.

Given this cultural moment, creationist ministries stand no chance with Christian academic institutions. I say that without malice or glee—I wish it were otherwise. And yet, if we believe that young-age creationism is the most faithful articulation of Scripture, that it most closely aligns with the catholic (small “c”) tradition, and that it is integral to the whole structure of Christian theology, *then we cannot be satisfied with the current situation.* Something must change.

It is here that the New Creationism holds great promise for the future of the movement. The British geologist Paul Garner used that phrase as the title of his 2009 book *The New Creationism*.¹⁴ The book introduced readers to the most interesting scientific developments within creationism at the time. Some years later, Joel Duff—a professor of biology at the University of Akron—mapped out a new movement within creationism with different emphases from mainstream creationist ministries. He called it the New Creationism.¹⁵

Joel Duff hails from the same denomination as mine (PCA) and is a theistic evolutionist. He disavows the young earth position, which means we disagree on a host of origins-related issues. However, Duff knows more about the history and current state of creationism than most creationists (no hyperbole) and has done creationists a great service by drawing attention to the New Creationism. If creationism has any future in Christian colleges and seminaries—and among people influenced by such institutions—the New Creationism stands a chance to reach such audiences. The future of creationism lies with the New Creationism.

Do not misunderstand. We need mainstream creationist organizations defending the cause in their lane. My intention is not to split the creationist community into another *us vs. them* divide. Rather we should recognize that the mainstream community and the New Creationist community operate at different levels within the broader creationist movement. For the good of the church and the flourishing of creationism, I am increasingly convinced we need far more scientists and theologians operating in the New Creationism lane.

Let me highlight key characteristics of the New Creationists summarized by Duff on his blog *Naturalis Historia*.¹⁶ New Creationists are:

- More gracious in dialogue with other creationists and willing to engage with non-YEC Christians. They treat Christians with other views as misinformed rather than as compromisers who do not have genuine faith.
- More likely to be involved in academia than be employed by a large creationist ministry.
- More comfortable applying an academic approach to questions which entails application of testing and

criticizing ideas rather than relying on fideistic tendencies and creation dogmatism.

- More comfortable not having an answer to every question and more likely to say, “I don’t know,” holding out hope their work will stimulate future answers.
- More driven by a curiosity of creation and desire to understand the world, not simply content to poke holes in conventional theories. They seek to be forward-thinking and develop creationist models faithful both to the available data and to Scripture.
- More willing to acknowledge the substantial empirical evidence for evolution from multiple fields, including biology, paleontology, genetics, biogeography, and so on.
- Less likely to fear or discourage new discoveries. While new discoveries pose challenges for the New Creationists, they find these challenges exciting rather than daunting.

I agree with Duff that the New Creationists are not yet a monolithic group. Nor are they a wholly different species from other creationists—there is overlap. Nonetheless, they represent a less combative way of articulating and defending creationism in the 21st century. If we want to reach people informed about the scientific evidence against creationism, including college graduates and seminary-trained pastors, New Creationism has more resonance and persuasive power.

Mainstream creationist ministries cannot deliver on that front. I have no doubt one can find examples of scientists within mainstream evangelical academia who are excited by standard creationist apologetics. Maybe readers can point me to testimonies of secular evolutionists converted after reading resources from a traditional creationist ministry—after all, salvation belongs to the Lord, and he can use anything to accomplish his purposes (Isa. 43:11; Eph. 2:8–9). But such cases are rare. Our challenge is to present creationism that is as open-spirited and generous in dialogue with fellow creationists as it is clear-headed and compelling in dialogue with non-creationists.¹⁷ My prayer is that God raises up a new generation of creationists—New Creationists—who will be more credible to new audiences.

IV. Some Thoughts on Epistemology

“Epistemology” is the theory of knowledge: How do we come to know things? How do we know what beliefs are true or false? The standard epistemology in most creationist settings begins by recognizing the Bible as the absolute word of God. Everything Scripture says is true. Since mainstream science is based on secular assumptions, rather than Scripture, we don’t need to take it seriously. We can ignore what conventional geologists and biologists are saying because they are unbelievers operating from unbiblical assumptions. That’s the picture, doubtless oversimplified, but still true to prevailing attitudes within creationist ministries.

I sympathize with this perspective. However, it’s a simplistic epistemology that leads to theological imbalance. Creationists who think this way assume that whatever their side believes on origins and a raft of related issues are the sober truth, and they dismiss critics because “they have the wrong assumptions.” But this position is implausible on its face. It is a false assumption that everything creationists believe about science is true, and whatever secular scientists and Christian evolutionists believe is wrong.

If I were a practicing physician, I would recommend two antidotes. The first is for creationists to reclaim the ancient insight from Augustine and other early Christians that *all truth is God’s truth*.¹⁸ Some readers fell off their chairs reading the last line, given how theistic evolutionists love to proclaim this maxim. It is a convenient spiritual cover to embrace all the conclusions of mainstream science, including deep time

and evolution: “Darwin was right because all truth is God’s truth!” My point is rather different. Just because Christians have abused this theological truth doesn’t mean we throw it out. Rather we should affirm it from a fully creationist point of view, loudly and without apology: *All truth is God’s truth*.

Consider the nature of truth. The triune God is the true God. The eternal Son is the embodiment of that truth—in John 14:6, Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The reality of truth is grounded in the intrinsic perfection of God’s character. God made all things, and therefore his wisdom is the source of truth *about everything*. As believers, we don’t know all the truth there is to know. We see through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). Yet truth itself is unified in the wisdom of God. As for unbelievers, they may deny the existence of God intellectually, but they cannot deny God’s creation. God made them in his image and placed them in a world full of truths waiting to be discovered. Unbelievers can’t know *spiritual* truth without supernatural assistance, but they can know truth nonetheless. They can know 3 x 3 is 9, that two contradictory claims can’t both be true, and that Shawshank Redemption is a great movie.

The same principle holds for proximate and contingent truths. These are facts about the world, science, statistics, the weather, and so on. All truth is God’s truth means *all facts are God’s facts*. Creationists should not be afraid of the truths non-religious people discover. Unbelievers are made in God’s image, so naturally they will know all kinds of truths about creation. Paul even says they know some truths about God (Rom. 1:18–23). They get many things wrong too—as 1 John 5:19 says, “the whole world is under the power of the evil one.” Still, creationists should not be constantly dismissive or hyper-skeptical about every mainstream scientific conclusion.

Our problem is we live in a “post-truth” world. People base their opinions on feelings and ideology, not objective facts. Truth is irrelevant in the post-truth era. There are no real facts anymore—politicians speak of “alternative facts,” bending the truth to suit their agenda. People no longer believe the news—it’s fake news. They don’t believe what scientists say—it’s fake science. Both the political left and right are guilty of these post-truth shenanigans. How we got here as a society is a complicated story, some of it related to postmodernism, much of it symptomatic of how social media corrupted public discourse.¹⁹

Not to mince words, but post-truth epistemology is anti-Christian. God’s people believe in the triumvirate of truth, facts, and objective reality. The gospel vanishes without it. Ironically, the epistemological habits of traditional creationists can sometimes become a gateway for embracing post-truth perspectives. They become so skeptical of *any* mainstream scientific knowledge that they end up denying what is objectively true. They overcompensate. They reject evidence. They don’t believe in facts. They only accept whatever fits within their own ideology or whatever “feels” right. The association between flat-earthism and young earth creationism is a case in point—as is the anti-vax movement.²⁰ Such post-truth attitudes are disconnected from biblical Christianity.

To be clear, merely affirming all truth is God’s truth does not mean we accept everything “experts” present as objective reality. Surely not! For one thing, truths derived from Scripture are non-negotiable—that the universe is young, that original creation was free from sin, that there was no death before the fall, that Adam and Eve existed, that the fall happened, and the rest. Since God revealed these truths, they are *de facto* part of objective reality. Creationists will therefore be skeptical of a scientific claim contradicting any of these revealed truths. In addition, raw data gleaned from scientific observation and testing sometimes appears to fit into an old age or evolutionary framework better than a creationist one. Young age creationists must be willing to admit this when it happens, but only *provisionally* without giving the impression unwittingly that the alternative frameworks are ultimately true.

The second antidote is from Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), the remarkable Dutch leader of the neo-Calvinist

movement in the 19th and early 20th century. He gave us the two concepts of *antithesis* and *common grace*. What is the antithesis? Kuyper describes the world as divided between two kinds of people, those who have experienced regeneration and the internal work of God's Spirit—and those who have not. The "spiritual" person versus the "natural" person. The spiritual person sees the world through the lens of Scripture; the natural person does not. The antithesis is the deep chasm between the thinking of believers and the thinking of unbelievers. Antithetical language is common in Scripture, e.g., the children of Abraham and the children of the devil (John 8:39–44); those who walk in the light and those who walk in darkness (1 John 1:5–10).²¹

Modern creationists are typically very alert to the antithesis. Creationist ministries know all too well that secular scientists and Christian non-creationists have the wrong starting assumptions and cannot think rightly about the world we live in. That's what Kuyper meant by the antithesis. But he didn't stop there. He also invoked the mitigating idea of common grace, a concept he inherited from John Calvin, the Genevan Reformer.²² Calvin taught that all humans are affected by sin. Our nature is corrupted by the fall. But God did not leave unregenerate people in total darkness. While unbelievers are certainly sinful, God by his common grace mercifully restrains the effects of sin. He works in the lives of unbelievers in a *non-saving* way and bestows natural gifts on both believers and unbelievers. When unbelieving politicians, artists, and scientists do things that are wise, good, and beautiful, that is the work of the Holy Spirit—common grace.

In mathematics and logic, Kuyper saw little difference between believers and unbelievers. But with disciplines like psychology, sociology, or religion, the antithesis looms large. Even so, God's common grace remains at work in those fields.²³ Popular-level creationist writing usually ignores common grace. Everything is cast in black and white categories. "We're right; they are wrong." The doctrine of common grace can serve as a needed corrective. Moreover, Scripture and experience teach us that the antithesis affects believers as well—it runs through our very hearts (cf. Rom. 7). Since we still struggle with indwelling sin, it is naïve to think we will always see things correctly just because we are born again. Sometimes unbelievers see more clearly than we do. Sometimes evolutionists see more clearly than we do.

Some creationists will balk at these concepts of common grace and all truth is God's truth. Perhaps they worry it will invite error and liberalism. They would rather create boundaries to delineate who's in and who's out. But while such instincts are well-meant, they can be overprotective, even retrogressive, and often end up stifling the power of orthodoxy. Sadly, they recapitulate the worst instincts of American separatist fundamentalism.

Recall the wisdom of dogmatic rank. Creationism has core commitments that are non-negotiable. You cannot be a creationist without them: six ordinary creation days; a young universe; a global flood; a cosmic fall, to name four. Thus, we should be less dogmatic about other beliefs and areas of research that do not question the doctrinal core of creationism (e.g., the extent of death in lower creatures like viruses and insects prior to Adam's transgression). Like any other theological tradition, creationists can and should have a spectrum of views. There is room to explore, speculate, and float ideas.

Henry Morris and John Whitcomb's classic book, *The Genesis Flood*, serves as a useful parable. Imagine if creationist leaders in the 1960s and 70s had drawn a hard line in the sand and insisted that no one could be a "true" creationist unless they agreed with every theory defended in the book. Either you believe in the vapor canopy theory, or you are a compromiser of the highest order!²⁴ This mode of reasoning would have been detrimental for modern creationism. It would not have allowed our movement to thrive.

V. Theologians Missing in Action

In recent decades, the most exciting work in creationism is from scientists. I have had the privilege of working with leading creationist scientists whom I consider outright geniuses. All the same, the secular establishment does not give them the time of day. They are relegated to working with shoestring budgets, limited avenues to publish research, and ostracized from the broader scientific guild (unless they keep their creationism private). These challenges aside, creationist scientists are spearheading the brightest developments in creationism.

I cannot say the same for creationists who are biblical scholars and theologians. They are missing in action. I realize, of course, that creationist ministries are publishing biblical and theological resources with the associated strengths and weaknesses noted earlier. Important essays have appeared in journals like *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, *Journal of Creation*, *Answers Research Journal*, and other creationist publications. Noteworthy monographs have been published by Masters Books, Wipf & Stock, Compass Classroom, and lesser known publishers.²⁵ But most evangelicals are not reading these essays and, even if they know about them, would likely not take them seriously as reliable scholarship.²⁶ Compounding the issue, very little creationist writing of any note is published in mainstream evangelical settings (e.g., IVP, Baker, Zondervan, Crossway, P&R, etc.). The situation is much the same with respected journals in Christian academia. In my own field of systematic theology, I can count on one hand the number of top-tier creationist essays published in the last twenty or thirty years.

For some reason, most Christians think there is nothing new to say about creationism from a theological perspective. In their minds, the main issues are easy and settled, case closed. But this view is muddled on at least two fronts. The first becomes clear if we reflect on theology more generally. Even though Christian orthodoxy has stable creeds and confessions, theology itself, unlike Scripture (Isa. 40:8), is not static but answers fresh questions for every new generation and cultural context.²⁷ Since creationism has no creeds and confessions, that's even more reason to be articulating creationism afresh for new generations. But where are those theologians and biblical scholars?

Second, it is misleading to say creationism is a “settled” theological tradition. Lots of interesting questions still have no good answers. Also, creationism potentially has insights on theological and exegetical questions that have puzzled non-creationists for decades. Just to be clear, I am not saying we need to be quoting Bible verses more—citing Scripture texts is not the same thing as doing theology. Endless attention to word studies and grammar will only get us so far. We need *theology*. We need to draw out the theological richness of the biblical story in synthetic ways that connect with people. Where is creationist theological reflection on “incarnation anyway” Christologies that are on the rise in academia?²⁸ What about creationist perspectives on the nature of language and linguistic diversity, and how they relate to the Babel account in Genesis 11:1–9? And where are creationists wrestling theologically—not just culturally or politically—with difficult questions about gender dysphoria, transgender ideology, and their connection to the biblical teaching that human sexuality is binary (esp. Gen. 1–2)? These questions only scratch the surface. Creationist theologians can serve the global church in distinctively orthodox and spiritually penetrating ways. To borrow the gospel idiom, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Matt. 9:37–38).

You might respond that mainstream publishers are often anti-creationist or at least reluctant to publish creationist books. They have no qualms publishing volumes on theistic evolution and old earth creationism, but we creationists get no such love. However, we should not heap all the blame on evangelical publishers. While anecdotal, I've had private conversations with some publishers who are open to creationist projects if they are competent. Furthermore, some of us who write in mainstream settings have decided it's not worth

investing time and scholarship defending creationism. That was me, but I now think that's a mistake.

We need good creationist theology. We need good creationist theology at the highest academic level, and we need good creationist theology at the lay level as well. We need this kind of literature from mainstream evangelical publishers like InterVarsity, Crossway, Baker, B&H, P&R, and the like. Most of these publishers rarely if ever publish anything defending creationism explicitly. While that presents major hurdles, they are not necessarily insurmountable. Besides, my bigger point is *we need creationism in those settings*. We should be presenting the theological depth and power of creationism. This task is urgent because the rising generation of intellectually minded evangelicals coming through college and seminary do not see the need or the relevance of creationism for the flourishing of Christian theology.²⁹

But we need similar work from theologians, New Testament scholars, historians, and philosophers. In my field of systematic theology, we need theologians showing the coherence, power, and beauty of creationism to a new generation—not merely in apologetics but on behalf of robust Christian doctrine. Christians need to see that creationism makes the most sense of biblical Christianity. We need that kind of work from academic theologians, from Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Anglicans, and non-denominational theologians. We need that kind of work at the popular level, at the semi-popular level, and at the highest academic level. Not only for academic and popular-level books, but also in book reviews, essays, book chapters, and articles. Again, I realize some of this is happening with creationist organizations, but that's irrelevant to my point. People connected with evangelical academia are unmoved and don't care. The bottom line: we need creationist theologians writing for mainstream, non-sectarian, Christian audiences.

If we keep regurgitating the same arguments in creationist echo chambers, we end up only preaching to the choir. In any case, most evangelicals who are not creationists will never be exposed to that material and—this is the biggest shame—will never encounter, much less feel in their bones, the theological vitality of creationism. More pragmatically, some of us need to be writing in mainstream settings if only because it will challenge us to wrestle with the gaps and problems on our own side, figuring out where we need to strengthen our position and learn from others. We need theologians in the fray at academic conferences making the case to our critics with patient humility and deep conviction. All of that is healthy for the creationist movement.

Some will worry about the inherent dangers of my proposal. If creationists are now bending over backwards to get published by Crossway or P&R (or whomever), then the tail will be wagging the dog: hello, theological compromise. As Paul said, “Watch your life and doctrine closely” (1 Tim. 4:16). I heartily agree creationists should always pursue doctrinal integrity and biblical faithfulness. However, this worry can be overblown; it can become a creationist crutch to keep producing sophomoric theology that will not stand up to scrutiny. Enough! We can't keep hiding behind the cry: “we're the persecuted minority!” Instead of whining, we must raise our game.

VI. Conclusion

I don't need to tell you it's hard to be a creationist in academia. Blood and tears, all sweat and no glory. But I remain unflinchingly optimistic. Young earth creationism is the future of Christian theology—and the truth is on our side.

Just ask the Pevensey children. The long winter is ending. Spring is in the air. Aslan is on the move. Don't ask me how I know that; it's a feeling I have that I can't shake. It won't let me go. Where is creationism headed in the coming decades? What comes to mind will sound like a tired cliché, but I'm dead serious: The best days of creationism are still very much ahead of us.³⁰

Notes

- 1 For present purposes, I use the term “creationist” as shorthand for young-age creationist.
- 2 To be fair, many competent academics (and laypeople) who are not creationists are just as “quirky”!
- 3 For the record, this “individual” is a composite of several creationists I have known in years past. I am not referring to any one person in particular!
- 4 These personality quirks probably end up having character flaws attached to them over time; personality quirks are not inherently sinful, but character flaws can be.
- 5 Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.
- 6 If theistic evolution is in doctrinal error—and I believe it is—should we not avoid fellowship or even friendship with Christians who hold this position? I cannot give a full answer here but let me say that if a Christian evolutionist affirms the essential teachings of Christianity, then we can enjoy fellowship (even though, in my view, their evolutionary commitments implicitly undermine, if not deny, their creedal confession). For relevant discussion, see my comments in *Defending Sin: A Response to the Challenges of Evolution and the Natural Sciences* (Baker Academic, 2024), 67–80. For a concrete example, see Todd Wood and Darrel Falk, *The Fool and the Heretic: How Two Scientists Moved beyond Labels to a Christian Dialogue about Creation and Evolution* (Zondervan, 2019).
- 7 Logos Research Associates. “Convictions,” September 3, 2024. <https://logosresearchassociates.org/convictions/>.
- 8 Creation Theology Society. “A Call to Unity.” <https://creationtheologysociety.org/about/a-call-to-unity/>.
- 9 Rhyné Putman, *When Doctrine Divides the People of God: An Evangelical Approach to Theological Diversity* (Crossway, 2020), 258.
- 10 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (Simon & Schuster, 1995), 43.
- 11 Graham Cole, *Faithful Theology: An Introduction* (Crossway, 2020), 76.
- 12 In my view, creationists should not vilify each other over scientific or non-theological arguments that are relatively marginal to the core of the biblical story (e.g., feathered dinosaurs; the flood boundary; Septuagint vs. the Masoretic text)—these issues are important but not *that* important. Relatedly, we should differentiate between doctrinal disputes (which are inherently more serious) and external, non-doctrinal differences (which are not).
- 13 For example, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (Yale University Press, 1989).
- 14 Paul Garner, *The New Creationism: Building Scientific Theories on a Biblical Foundation* (Evangelical Press, 2009).
- 15 For the first mention of the New Creationism, see Joel Duff, “Young-Earth Creationism in 2021: The Dawn of The New Creationists, Part 1,” <https://thenaturalhistorian.com/2021/06/24/young-earth-creationism-in-2021-the-dawn-of-the-new-creationists-part-1/>. In private email communication (August 8, 2024), Duff confirmed that he coined the phrase “New Creationists” independently of Garner’s *The New Creationism*.
- 16 The list is from Duff’s blog with small edits: <https://thenaturalhistorian.com/2021/07/01/young-earth-creationism-in-2021-defining-characteristics-of-the-new-creationists/>.
- 17 I adapted the wording from David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Crossway, 2003), 420: “Our challenge is to write theology that is as open-spirited and generous in dialogue with fellow evangelicals as it is clearheaded and compelling in dialogue with non-evangelicals.”
- 18 See the classic statement in Arthur F. Holmes, *All Truth Is God’s Truth* (Eerdmans, 1977). In Augustine’s own words, “Let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master.” Augustine, “On Christian Doctrine” in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 1st series, vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff (Christian Literature, 1887), 545.
- 19 See Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth* (The MIT Press, 2018); Tom Nichols, *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2024).
- 20 From a sociological perspective, see Alex Olshansky, Robert Peaslee, and Asheley Landrum, “Flat-Smacked! Converting to Flat Eartherism,” *Journal of Media and Religion* 19, no. 2 (2020): 46–59. However, we should note that some creationist ministries have published critiques of flat-earthism. For example, see Danny R. Faulkner, *Falling Flat: A Refutation of Flat Earth Claims* (New Leaf, 2019).

- 21 John Frame, “Antithesis and the Doctrine of Scripture,” in *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (P&R, 2010), 335–46.
- 22 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Westminster: 1960), 2.2–3. See also Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Eerdmans, 2001).
- 23 For critical analysis, see Stephen Moroney, *The Noetic Effects of Sin: A Historical and Contemporary Exploration of How Sin Affects Our Thinking* (Lexington Books, 2000), 27–48.
- 24 Richard Averbeck, an evangelical OT scholar and longstanding professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (now retired), knows this from personal experience. Decades ago, his mentors at Grace Theological Seminary in Winona Lake, Indiana, ostracized him for refusing to accept the vapor canopy theory. Averbeck was a young earth creationist at the time—though he later abandoned the view—but that dark experience makes it extremely difficult for him to even contemplate returning to his young earth creationist roots (Averbeck, personal email communication, August 14, 2024).
- 25 Some helpful creationist volumes have also appeared from Reformation Heritage Books—e.g., William VanDoodewaard, *The Quest for the Historical Adam: Genesis, Hermeneutics, and Human Origins* (Reformation Heritage, 2015); Cornelis Van Dam, *In the Beginning: Listening to Genesis 1 and 2* (Reformation Heritage, 2021).
- 26 Of course, there are exceptions. Todd Wood’s recent work has been widely read and discussed in non-YEC settings. See especially Todd C. Wood, *The Quest: Exploring Creation’s Hardest Problems* (Compass Classroom, 2018).
- 27 Francis Turretin’s *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* and Charles Hodge’s *Systematic Theology* were fine volumes for their day (17th and 19th century, respectively) and are still worth reading today; nonetheless, many later works of theology have since been written for new generations and for different cultural contexts. As missiologists remind us, this dynamic reflects the very nature of the gospel—e.g., see Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture,” in *Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis, 1996), 3–15.
- 28 For an account of incarnation anyway Christology, see Edwin Chr. Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Theistic evolutionists often adopt this approach to sidestep the classical doctrine of the fall of Adam and Eve, e.g., see Patrick Franklin, “Theodicy and the Historical Adam: Questioning a Central Assumption Motivating Historicist Readings,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 74, no. 1 (2022): 39–53.
- 29 I’ve been painting in broad strokes, so let me add nuance. Old Testament scholars have made a better showing than other Christian scholars—may their tribe increase. For example, see Andrew E. Steinmann, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (InterVarsity, 2019); Andrew E. Steinmann, “A Note on the Refrain in Genesis 1: Evening, Morning, and Day as Chronological Summary,” *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 5, no. 2 (2016–2017): 125–40; William D. Barrick, “Historical Adam: Young-Earth Creation View,” in *Four Views on the Historical Adam*, ed. Matthew Barrett and Ardel B. Caneday (Zondervan, 2013), 197–227. In past years, Barrick has presented several penetrating essays at the Evangelical Theological Society meetings. We could add Todd Beall, Eugene Merrill, and others.
- 30 My thanks to Robert Erle Barham, Ken Coulson, Neal Doran, Stephen Lloyd, Michael Radmacher, and Henry B. Smith Jr. for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

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