

Do we need another creationist journal?

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Years ago, I found myself embroiled in a heated editorial controversy, which I felt very strongly threatened the integrity of creationist publishing. These many years later, the details of our dispute seem much less important, but I can viscerally recall how angry I was when my objections were ignored. After losing that fight, I wrote a paper arguing for the Christian basis of double-blind peer review, the form in which the author and reviewers are unknown to each other. I sent it around to a few others who agreed with my perspective, and they suggested modifications and agreed to join as co-authors. We published it in the inaugural volume of *Answers Research Journal*.¹ Google Scholar tells me it has been cited once, which is perhaps more than it deserves.²

I look back at that paper with a bit of chagrin, not exactly regret, but certainly closer to embarrassment than pride. The paper is not a bad paper *per se*, but it is not very good either. The argument put forth is an (unfortunately common) exercise in using the Bible to justify current practice rather than allowing the Word of God to challenge those practices at every level. Given the circumstances and my attitude at the time, I do not think I could have imagined much beyond what I wrote in that paper, so perhaps the intervening years of maturity and growth were necessary to bring me to the ideas I will describe here.

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I now have three decades of experience in all aspects of scholarly publication: author, reviewer, and editor. I have given helpful reviews and critical reviews. My reviews have been accepted, and others were ignored. I have received dozens, maybe hundreds, of reviews of my own work. Some suggestions have been very helpful, and others have been aggravating and nitpicky. Some of my papers were published with nearly no changes requested at all, which frankly leaves me very uneasy. Other papers were rejected for reasons I still think were unreasonable. My work as an editor has been much more limited, and I have begun actively refusing invitations to work in that role. Nevertheless, there are a few papers I edited that I recall with great fondness, and there are some papers I edited that can still tie my insides into a knot of anxiety.

Throughout my experience in scholarly publishing, I also watched as the internet completely transformed the publication process. When I started out, I received proofs of my articles printed on paper. Journals back then primarily distributed paper copies through the mail. The entire process from submission to print could take months or years. Over the years, digital editing, open access, predatory publishing, preprint archives, and academic piracy have all changed scholarly publishing, not always for the better. Today the individual article is king, and many (most?) journals have entirely abandoned printing individual issues.

Even amidst these changes, much of the core experience remains the same. Blind peer review, at least in the sense of not knowing who the reviewers are, remains the primary means by which scholarly publication occurs. This peer review was the process I wanted to defend in 2008, and now seventeen years later, I seriously suspect it may not be worth saving.

The model of peer review we described in 2008 works well, as long as everyone involved understands the system exactly the same, respects the process even when they disagree, and agrees on the basic criteria of what makes a “good paper.” The reality of course is that none of these things are realistic. Different people, even highly educated scholars, have different ideas of what constitutes a good paper and what the role of the editor or reviewer should be. And those are the reasonable problems.

What really undermines blind peer review is the anonymity. The cloak of anonymity allows us to speak the truth without fear of reprisal, but the truth delivered in such a way is often ungracious and cruel.³ Delivery of these reviews by impersonal email only compounds the problem by creating too much opportunity for misunderstanding. Anger is far too common, and that anger is covered up, rather than resolved, by the anonymous process.

Sometimes however, the anger is inevitable because a manuscript simply fails to be a good paper by any reasonable measure. The most common outcomes are either confrontation, argument, and appeal or, if that fails, sending the paper to some other outlet. This for me is the biggest shortcoming to the entire process. I could understand going through the hardship and struggle of peer reviewed publishing *if* I knew the outcome would be respected, good papers would be published, and bad papers would disappear and not confuse or mislead the public. That is certainly not the world we live in.

The democratizing power of the internet and social media has led to vast opportunities for people to express their opinions. No one needs a journal article, especially in the world of creation research. Making an attractive video explaining your ideas will probably have a much greater public impact through social media than the arduous process of producing a technical paper that a handful of people will read and fewer will understand. Why bother with scholarly publishing at all? Have the new realities of the internet and social media rendered peer reviewed publications futile and irrelevant?

These frustrations have led me to reflect more deeply on scholarly publishing, especially in light of my Christian commitments and theology. The first question I want to know is what value scholarly publication actually brings. The truth is that I love a well-written, scholarly paper. I love citations that I can check. I love methods that I can understand. I love following an articulate argument, even if I disagree with the conclusion. There is something beautiful and beneficial about knowing exactly what the evidence is, how it was studied, and how it is being interpreted. In non-scholarly publications, like press releases or social media posts, I can make any unsupported claim I like, but in scholarly publication, I must support my statements, either by citation or appeal to evidence. There is nowhere to hide bad reasoning or weak evidence. Even if such works can be understood by only a few, they *can* be understood with discipline and effort. We can identify where someone might have gone wrong in their thinking. We can see where new evidence needs to be sought. We can trace citations to make sure that past ideas have been represented correctly. In short, a good scholarly article is *fruitful*. It gives us a place to go to look for more evidence and data, where a nonscholarly publication leaves us wanting more detail and unable to verify or falsify its basic claims. That is a value worth preserving.

The second value I want to preserve is the journal itself, which is effectively now a website that publishes scholarly articles. Journals have become a shorthand or insignia for editorial practices and quality of publications. I want to be able to recognize a journal name and know that it means the paper is worth reading. We all know this function already happens, and it seems to me to be a practical time saver.

Journal reputation also leads to a public value. I never recommend any publications or websites unreservedly to anyone (especially my own), because I want people to think carefully and critically about everything they hear or see, but I will recommend some sites as more worthwhile and less error prone than

others. Having a journal/site with a convenient name that has a good reputation for quality publications is helpful in that regard, not that we can “trust” what they publish but that reading through the latest publications is worth your time even if you disagree with the conclusions.

The third value I recognize in scholarly peer review is the ability to improve scholarly work. At its most basic level, peer review could be seen as an opportunity to correct embarrassing mistakes before the paper is published, but more deeply, for a community supposedly dedicated to understanding the history of God’s creation, we ought to welcome opportunities to expand our understanding even of our scholarly shortcomings. In our quest to understand God’s creation, we ought to be motivated at every step by the question, “How can we improve?”

I am happy to say that I have experienced this in many different ways in my career. I have edited papers that ended up much stronger than they were when they were submitted. I have reviewed articles where my suggestions were taken seriously, and I have benefited greatly from thoughtful responses to my own work. When peer review works well, it can be quite beautiful.

With these values in mind, how can we achieve them in a way that demonstrates the two greatest commandments, loving God and loving neighbor? I suppose there are many ways to answer that question. One could simply continue the course with blind peer review and hope to cultivate better authors, reviewers, and editors, but what if we tried something really different and strange and uniquely Christian? What if we tried to do peer review in a way that values our place in the *community* of Christ? What if we valued the Christian community as much as we value good scholarly publishing?

We call our proposal *community review*. The first distinctive of this process is our intention to dispense with anonymity. When given a paper to review, the reviewers will know who wrote it, and when the reviews come in, the authors will know who wrote them as well. No more hiding. If you need to say something negative about a paper, you will have direct accountability for the way you say it. If you accuse someone of incompetence, malpractice, or deception, you will be held accountable.

Thinking about this component more positively, everyone has value to Jesus Christ. He died for us all, and for those of us who are Christians, we know that we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in good works that God made for us. A simplistic, blunt editorial rejection might be adequate, but how much more powerful could it be to find ways to affirm authors even if we have to admit their paper is not very good?

That brings me to the second distinctive of community review. We intend, as often as possible, to deliver reviews in person or by the next best means through teleconferencing. We want to value authors and reviewers personally as human beings and neighbors that we should love. I have witnessed and experienced many hurt feelings over the years due to misreading or misunderstanding coldly worded assessments, but with the opportunity to directly interact with people, we will experience the love of Christ even in this sensitive practice of “peer review.”

Third, we have dispensed with the editorial hierarchy and detailed procedures manual. Jesus chided the Gentiles for exercising tyrannical authority and encouraged us his followers to serve the community. Our editorial board will act together as a community that cares for its members and everyone who interacts with us, even as we also seek to improve submissions, choose outstanding papers to publish, and (God willing) build a testimony for quality and excellence. We do not believe these goals are mutually exclusive. Rather, we anticipate that excellence will be born from pursuing Jesus’ desire that we build up the body of Christ.

At this point we have also spurned any detailed procedures manual. We only ask that prospective

authors follow use numbered endnotes for references following either the Chicago Manual of Style or the Vancouver format. We also provide authors and reviewers with no procedures or processes to appeal decisions. Authors and reviewers are welcome to bring grievances to the editorial board, but those grievances will be decided on an individual basis by the editorial community. Each case will be different, and there is little sense in trying to devise one uniform process that applies to everything.

How can you be a part of this community? Submit a paper and see what happens. We are not a closed community. We invite everyone everywhere to give it a try. Join us in this crazy experiment. Consider this a call for papers. We plan to publish a single annual issue, and papers must be submitted by September 12, 2025 for inclusion in the next issue.

And that brings me to the title question here at the conclusion of my essay. Do we need another creationist journal? The answer, I think, is an easy no. We have more than enough creationist journals. Community review, on the other hand, intrigues me (and the editorial community) enough to warrant a test run. So we offer to Jesus and the church this new journal *New Creation Studies* as the first journal to practice community review. Could this go terribly wrong? Certainly, but it might also bear fruit that we cannot even imagine at the moment. God only knows what will happen, but choosing a path that is deliberately Christian and intentionally obedient to the commands of Christ cannot be a complete disaster.

Ultimately, our success will be determined by our output. Will you find these articles to be quality works that advance our understanding of God's creation? Will participating in the editorial process build up the body of Christ? In this inaugural issue, we present two research articles, two essays, and the abstracts from *Origins 2024*. The article by Brand and Chadwick presents the results of their survey of bioturbation in the fossil record. Their work helps us to better understand the meaning of trace fossils in Flood sediments. The second article by Guzman and McLain reports on the baraminology of Silesauridae, a terrestrial group of dinosauriforms said to be the evolutionary precursors of true dinosaurs. This work will aid in our understanding of silesaurids and the origins of the various dinosaur kinds. The essay by Hans Madueme contains his assessment of the young age creationist community as a relative newcomer, with both commendations and admonitions that we creationists need to consider. Finally, my own essay reflects on the 2024 book *Perspectives on the Historical Adam and Eve: Four Views*, edited by Kenneth Keathley.

On behalf of the editorial community, welcome to *New Creation Studies*! We pray that our small offering here will bring glory to God and build up the community.

Notes

- 1 Roger W. Sanders et al., "Toward a Practical Theology of Peer Review," *Answers Research Journal* 1 (2008): 65–75.
- 2 Gene P. Siegal, "Navigating Interpersonal Conflict and Peer Review," *Laboratory Investigation* 89, no. 3 (March 2009): 256–58, <https://doi.org/10.1038/labinvest.2008.160>.
- 3 I am as guilty as anyone, maybe moreso, of writing excessively aggressive and harsh reviews. I want to do better.