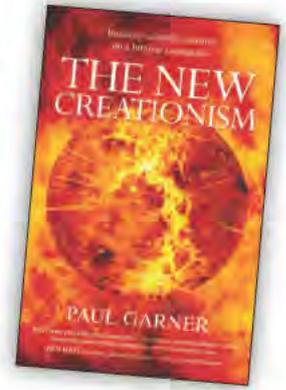




# The New Creationism



## Paul Garner

2009 was of course a significant milestone. It marked the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Darwin, and the 150th anniversary of the publication of Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection.

The evolutionary establishment celebrated with Darwin-themed events throughout the year and the media actively promoted the anniversaries too.

### Positive vision

Perhaps it seems an odd moment to say it, but there has never been a better time to be a creationist! I say this because a new style of creationism is emerging today which offers a fresh and exciting challenge to conventional thinking about origins. For too long, creationism has been synonymous with anti-evolutionism. But creationism is maturing, and, as it does so, it is moving away from the merely negative to develop a positive vision of its own. In fact, I have made this the central theme of my new book, *The New Creationism: Building Scientific Theories on a Biblical Foundation* (Garner 2009).

### Better explanations

One of the most obvious signs of this growing maturity is that creationists are no longer simply critiquing evolution, but are seeking to explain the data better by developing theories of their own.

One field in which creationists have made good progress is biology. An entirely new sub-discipline called baraminology has been established in the last 20 years (Wood 2006). Baraminology – a word meaning 'the study of created kinds' – seeks to discover the boundaries of the kinds that God made in the beginning, what changes have taken place within those kinds since they were created, how predators and parasites arose



Creation biologists are interested in studying the kinds of plants and animals that God made.  
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as a consequence of the curse upon sin, and so on. A thriving community of creation biologists now exists, with its own professional society, technical publications and scientific conferences.<sup>1</sup>

There is a popular image of creationism as a belief in fixed and unchanging species. One can only imagine that those who promulgate this wildly inaccurate caricature know nothing about modern creation biology!

### Geology

Or consider the field of geology. In 1994, a creationist team of three geologists and three geophysicists proposed a new scientific theory to explain what took place during the global Flood described in Genesis chapters 6-9 (Austin *et al* 1994). It is essentially a modification of the modern theory of plate tectonics, which seeks to describe and explain the motion of the plates that make up the earth's crust.

According to this new theory, the Flood involved the catastrophic resurfacing of our planet in the space of a few months. Catastrophic plate tectonics, as the theory



Rock layers were deposited during the catastrophic tectonics of the global flood. © James Powell.

is known, is able to explain everything that conventional plate tectonics explains and more besides, as well as providing a means by which the ocean level could rise to inundate the continents. Another outworking of this theory is that the oceans would have been heated by the volcanic activity associated with the sea-floor upheaval. Creationist meteorologists have shown how this would have generated heavy snowfall after the Flood, leading to the rapid onset of an ice age (Oard 1990).

### Radiometric dating

But what about radiometric dating methods, used by geologists to estimate the age of the earth based on the decay of radioactive isotopes? Don't these methods suggest that the earth's rocks and minerals are millions or billions of years old? While this is perhaps the greatest scientific challenge to the creationist concept of a young world, creationists are now doing original research in this area too.

Previously, creationists tended to focus upon anomalous and discrepant dates in order to discredit the radiometric

methods. By contrast, evolutionists tended to emphasise the overall agreement and consistency of the data, 'explaining away' the anomalies and discrepancies. However, recently published work by a creationist research team suggests an entirely new approach which is able to explain both the consistencies and the discrepancies.

This team has uncovered multiple, independent lines of evidence suggesting that radioactive decay rates were accelerated at one or more times in the earth's past (Vardiman *et al* 2005). This has opened the way for all the data to be explained in a way that wasn't possible before, offering a real advance in our understanding of geological history. As in biology, there is now a fledgling society for creationists in the earth sciences, led by seven PhD geologists, and the proceedings of their first two conferences can be found online.<sup>2</sup>

### Cosmology

Even in cosmology, perhaps the least well developed field in creationism, exciting new ideas are being discussed and debated. The thorny question of how light reached the earth from distant galaxies in a short time frame is being addressed with the equations of Einstein's theory of general relativity. Intriguingly, these solutions are also offering novel insights into long-standing puzzles for conventional cosmological theories, such as the existence of dark matter and dark energy (Hartnett 2007).

It is, indeed, an exciting time to be a creationist! Although these theories are relatively new, they have been successful in explaining our scientific observations, have led to testable predictions that anticipated future discoveries, and have expanded our knowledge and understanding of the natural world. Much work remains to be done to test, refine and apply these theories. Nevertheless, when we consider that creationists generally lack the resources and manpower that evolutionary scientists have available when developing their theories, the scientific fruitfulness of these ideas is nothing short of remarkable.

### New era

So, in a year of Darwin celebrations, creationists also have much to celebrate. Creationism is growing up to meet the challenges of the 21st century. An increasing number of talented young scientists are getting involved, multi-disciplinary research collaborations are being forged, a new era of professionalism, self-criticism and peer review has dawned, and exciting discoveries are being made. These signs of health and vitality must be nurtured and encouraged because it seems certain that the new creationism is here to stay. ■

### Footnotes

1. See the website of the Creation Biology Study Group: <http://www.creationbiology.org>.

2. See the Proceedings of the First and Second Conferences on Creation Geology: <http://www.cedarville.edu/event/geology/>.

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New theories are even helping to solve the distant starlight problem. © Cole Vineyard, iStockphoto.com.